Adventure

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THE MESSAGE

BY PLANTER CHASE

CHAPTER I

FROM FICTION TO FACT

FRANKLY I was loafing on the job, when I heard Canfield yell like the proverbial Comanche. I was deep in that thrilling tale of Scott's, "Anne of Geierstein," and I was on that particularly thrilling page where he tells of the secret message, sent by the hand of the treacherous priest from hero in prison to friends outside, a message in which the one word that told the truth was written in invisible ink. I was absorbed in the grim story and did not want another assignment that night. I was a sufficiently ambitious young newspaper reporter, but I loved a good piece of fiction quite as well as anything, and it was good fiction I was reading.

But Canfield's yell was of the sort that would interrupt the mental processes of a man in a trance. I knew that he would be in upon me, there in the local-room, next minute. So I turned my book face downward to keep my place, and pushed it into the drawer of my desk. When my chief burst in at the door I was busily writing away with a lead-pencil without a point—

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and with a pointless pretense, too, I may as well admit, for I had not a thing to do.

"Hawtry!" cried Canfield, and held up a commanding finger. Then, before I could even show the proper alacrity that a young reporter should evince, he was shouting out his tip: "Somebody's shot Dan Mather, detective sergeant, down by the Court Street bridge!" he announced in a hoarse voice that could have been heard across the street, had anybody been there to listen at that hour of the rainy night. "And they tell me there's a girl being kidnaped or something of the sort. Mather tried to make an arrest, and got a bullet that pitched him off the bridge into the river. That's all I've got, and you've got to get the rest. Hurry!"

He was a live one, my chief. Short and stout and red of face, he was a bundle of nerves and muscles that was always in action, like a bounding ball of hard-wound rubber. He was the quickest man to think, to decide and to strike—figuratively or literally—whom I have ever known. He was the brains of our paper, and he was in a sense the dynamo of our energy. He had the faculty, at least, of instilling his enthusiasm into others.

A tired reporter is a hard receptacle to fill with any such commodity, too, on a wet night, when he has done what he considers a big day's work. But Canfield could do even that, and quite apart from any excitement I might naturally feel over the thing itself, his manner of reciting the tragedy roused my imagination.

I was on my feet before he finished the telling.

"Court Street bridge!" I repeated, as I grabbed a pencil and a sheaf of paper from my desk. "Quickest way there will be to run down Lawrence and up the wharves, won't it?"

"Sure! Go to it!"

And that was the beginning.

I was just a boy of twenty-two. I had been a reporter in my small-town home in a neighboring state and, though there was no financial need in my family, I had come to the city to try to make good in a larger field. I was a very ordinary young chap who had simply ambition and an interest in the work, coupled with good health and a fair education, as capital. I had done enough satisfactory work so that the assignment on the murder story was not an absolute chance, though the fact that I was the only man in at the moment made it possible that I should be the first out. And, barring weariness, I was as fond of adventure and excitement as anybody.

I went down the stairs from the office at a three-step pace. It was raining hard when I hit the street, but a man on a murder story does not think of such things as umbrellas. And I ran to the corner of our street and across the next block as if my own life depended on it, instead of the mere story of how poor Dan Mather had lost his. I turned toward the river, in a short little cross-street that was as dark as an ink-spot on a black cat in a coal-bin, and ran toward the red lights on the bridge which showed in misty ruby stars.

The way lay between high warehouses, and the echo of my feet on the pavement rattled back and forth against the brick walls in hollow fashion. Not another soul seemed to be in the same block, and I had only the rain beating in my face for company. But I knew my ground. I had worked in the river region and I have a faculty for remembering localities.

I REACHED the bridge and saw a single man standing at the end of the railing next to the upright truss, where his figure had not been visible to me till I was almost upon him. I remember noticing him with a little start of surprise, as I turned to run down the steps that led to the wharf below. And I had a notion at the time that he moved and stepped back into the deeper shadow as I came close to him. Still his motion was not very distinct; and next moment I had half forgotten him in my effort to be sure of my footing on the black wharf.

We have considerable river trade in my city, which I shall not name here because it is not necessary to my story. All along through the heart of the great down-town section and then off through the outlying districts the stream is a vigorous one, of depth enough to admit good-sized steamers. The wharf arrangements are ample, and warehouses of all sorts line the river on both sides.

Some of the buildings are of fine modern type and have reinforced concrete landings for the steamers; others are old and tumble-down, and the wharves of them are a shame and a disgrace. I suppose such con-

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ditions must characterize any river town, but I am not familiar with others. I describe my own because I have reason to recall some of those disreputable docks. And I think few places I have ever seen have been lighted with so little regard to the real purposes of illumination.

How well I remember the blind gloom over the surface of that river on that never-to-be-forgotten night of rain. The wharf to which I groped my way was a narrow affair, probably not over ten feet wide and so completely in shadow that I had to feel my way with my feet, for I dared not trust to finding sound boarding in that particular quarter. And over the dimly seen edge I could barely make out, by occasional swelling gleams, the face of the water. If there had been a chasm there instead of a river, I might have seen almost as much.

The wharves all along this portion of the river front connected with each other and were easily accessible, each from each. I expected to make my way along from one to another till I reached the next street, where the shooting of Mather was reported to have taken place; and I was excited enough by this time to make a goodly pace. But I had not gone far when I heard shoutings and other noises of the crowd ahead of me, and stopped to listen for any guidance they might be to me.

A police boat was already out on the surface of the stream. It lay low down under the bridge of the next street and seemed strangely far away from me. The light of lanterns and of a searchlight, from some steamer laid up at a wharf beyond, showed distinctly, as soon as my eyes once caught the gleams of them. And it was while I waited to get some notion of what they were doing, that the first awful touch of the tragedy came out of the darkness and reached me.

I heard the wash of the river plainly. The roar of cars and trains and other late traffic in the streets was muffled behind the buildings, and the water's plaintive swash against the piling below was as audible as if I had stood beside some brawling stream. I was in one of those strange silent spots you can always find in the very heart of a great city, if you really look for them.

And it was then as I stood listening, afraid to hurry on till I could give strict heed to my going again, that some chance ray from the distant searchlight threw itself horizontally along the black ripples below, till it reached a point opposite to and near where I stood. And I looked and saw, as plainly as I now see the page on which I write, the white face of a man, with his black hair washed back, his chin up, his mouth open as if in feeble gasping—so plainly a feeble gasp—swimming toward the wharf and me—swimming in slow, exhausted strokes that seemed, and will always seem to me, the last desperate fighting efforts of a brave chap for his life!

I WAS not a very impressionable youngster then. I had seen enough of the sights that newspaper men have to see to be hardened beyond any hysterical excitability. But the thrill of horror I felt at that momentary view I shall never forget. I say momentary, for it was just that. It did not last a second. It was there and gone again, like a slow summer flash of lightning which is not the slowest thing in nature either. And when it had passed, I was almost sure that I had not seen anything after all. The searchlight swung up again, and the river was as black as before; and not a sound nor a sign of the presence of a living being out there on its heaving breast remained.

I stood still for an instant, not knowing what to do. No one was near me to whom I could shout for aid, if I were to be called upon to effect a rescue. All the wharf was still and dark, the warehouses back of me simply blank walls with dark windows and closed doors. Plenty of people were evidently gathered at the next bridge, but they were beyond swift reach.

I was conscious that I was not a very strong swimmer, and therefore poorly equipped for any single-handed effort to succor a man who was near the point of exhaustion, as I was sure the fellow I had seen had been. I was at a loss for a single second before making a decision. And then I decided nothing, for I saw a streak of light shine suddenly out across the water from a new quarter—from almost directly below me, indeed—and the surprise was so great that I did nothing but watch for another long moment.

Fitful, capricious light it was. It jumped out of the gloom, as if flung forth by some sharp impulse behind it, as a stream of water spurts from the nozzle of a hose. And it swept the river with direct and de-

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liberate search, as evidently to pick up the man I had seen, as if some announcement of purpose accompanied its appearance. And then, suddenly, once again I saw the swimmer. I even saw the gleam of his eyes in the ray. I saw a beating hand rise out of the water in helpless, despairing signal for aid, dumb as some beckoning ghostly finger might have been, but terrible in its appeal!

And then, abruptly, a long black shadow slid out from beneath my very feet, carrying the light with it—a thing like a giant fish, it seemed, as I gazed at it breathless. Moving without a sound it glided over the water, eating up its own path of radiance as it went straight along upon its course toward the pitiful object.

I had no notion at first as to just what the thing was, so quiet, so swift, so prompt was it. Then I became quickly sure that it could be nothing else but a motor-boat, though I missed at once the sound of exhaust from its engine. But I had hardly settled that matter in my mind, when my alarm as to its handling, in relation to the apparently projected rescue, filled my brain to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

If motor-boat it was, it certainly was running at a singularly reckless pace for approach to a man in the water. And while I looked I drew my breath again in horror, for I recognized that something very different from a rescue was about to happen.

The distance from wharf to swimmer was not so great but that the pace of the swift boat would cover it in a matter of seconds; and I saw that the craft, headed straight for the spot where the struggling figure lay, was increasing rather than slackening its speed!

What in the name of human mercy could it mean? I stood on the edge of the dock and yelled madly out over the water at the shadow of a boat that swept away from me without even the sign of a pilot to direct its going, so far as eyes at my standpoint could see. And there was no stop or swerve or pause in the course of the thing. Only the light went suddenly out, just as the sharp nose of the boat came up to a point where it would presently shut out from me the sight of the white face in the water. And I stood half paralyzed with fevered certainty that I had seen all but the actual catastrophe of a tragedy, unexampled for brutal horror.

I could not move till I had listened through an awful instant. In it I heard what seemed to my strained ears like the fearful hollow pounding of a boat over the head and body of a drowning man, and I was suddenly aware that I was screaming for help, and for vengeance, and for the pity of Heaven!

No one heard me. It seems unbelievable to me sometimes now, as I think of it. But not a sign, that my voice carried beyond a few yards, or ever was caught by the men and women who were crowding the bridge where the officer had been shot, was received by me. The echo of it, like the echo of my earlier footsteps between the buildings, was thrown back mockingly, as if all humans were on the other side of the world.

I STARTED back from the edge of the dock as if from a precipice, and found the wall behind me. Feeling for support, I cowered there a moment, too incredulous that I had seen and heard aright to be willing to act, yet with my heart beating painfully, achingly after the shock.

Then I turned and looked along the wharf and saw that I had not been heard, and that there had been, besides myself, apparently no other witness of the thing I had seen; and I began stumblingly, blindly, to try to make my way along by the warehouse wall to the presence and companionship and help of honest men.

I was not far upon my way: I suppose I had left the bridge where I had seen the lonely man in the shadow, perhaps a hundred feet behind me, when I had been halted by the awful glimpse of a human being in distress. Now I had made but a few feet farther, and I was still a long way from my destination. I was scarcely aware of the object I had started with, as again I tried to hurry, and I panted along with only one desire—to take my horrid tale to some ear of authority that could set on foot inquiry that would be effective.

I began to burn with hot desire—indeed, as my mind became capable of grasping how utterly improbable any theory of accident would be, and what must be the meaning of the thing I had witnessed if the accident hypothesis were eliminated, I became possessed with eagerness to run, to rush, to cry aloud again before I could be

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either on safe footing or within better hearing of the crowd at the Court Street bridge.

That was why I stumbled and fell almost as soon as I started. I hit some obstruction, like a box or a loose plank, and I went down upon the boards with a resounding bang and a painful physical jolt. My hand came upon a nail, jagged and protruding from a beam, and I felt the stab of it in the palm before I was aware of the bruises on my knees. As I struggled back to my feet, I felt the gush of warm blood on my fingers.

Again I was forced to stop and stand still to get my poise and to wrap my handkerchief hastily about my injured hand. I felt a little dizzied by the upset, and I backed again toward what I thought in the darkness to be another closed warehouse door.

I found, however, that if it were a door at all it must be open, for I felt only space where I had expected to find support. And so I stood still in the entrance and bound up my already very painful little wound, tying my handkerchief about it as tight as I could with the aid of my teeth to knot it.

I reached out then and touched the brick of an inside wall and found that I was in the mouth of some sort of passage. With the idea that it might be another way to the street, I turned to look behind me. Utter darkness and stillness filled the void. I stood and waited, for what, I did not know. Then again I put out my hand, and this time it came upon something else than brick—something soft, but yielding; still, but warm!

And, all at once, I felt my arm seized and a hand came out and against my face, gropingly at first, then with firm decision, and settled over my mouth. And as I felt it there I knew that it was not the rough, heavy hand of some ruffian of the waterside, ready next instant to strike a killing blow. It was a small, soft, gentle little hand—the hand of a woman, a girl!

The warning not to cry out was too plain to be disregarded, startling as the sudden contact was. But I would hardly have spoken first, for a quick whisper came to me, almost against my ear, an instant after the touch:

"Oh, please! Please do not make a sound!" it pleaded. "They are all around us!"

CHAPTER II

THE NICHE IN THE WALL

MY MOTHER used to tell me that curiosity would be the death of me. I have been all these years trying to be sure just what she meant. I remember that when she said it, my father used to laugh and nod his head. Dear old father, who worked so hard and cared so much that his boy should grow to be a man's man! But mother's verdict seemed true to him; and I, who then thought that curiosity was a woman's trait, was anything but pleased.

But I have lived long enough to know that the fairer sex has no corner on that amusing human vice—or virtue; and to agree that my mother was right in her anticipation that it would bring me varied experience. It has not yet brought me death. And I think it was curiosity as much as any other thing that kept me silent and prevented my striking out in the darkness and then running blindly away in terror, when the startling evidence of human proximity and a warning of danger came to me so suddenly.

I did stand still. I took hold of the arm that had reached out to touch me and found it a slender one, delicate, clothed in some material that was anything but the rough garment one might expect to find on a woman who would be likely to be abroad in such a locality. How we judge by appearances! And how ill we judge! It was velvet, that coat which covered the arm I held. And the hand, though ungloved, was the hand of a girl of standing and quality. I knew it as well as if it had been whispered to me there on that first moment when her warning of danger was communicated.

Perhaps it was the delicate scent, perhaps the firm, soft touch itself. No one ever knows of what composite record of the senses the impression of such a moment is made up. But I was sure that some girl who had no business at all in such a place was there with me, and that, if I were in danger, so was she.

I took her hand gently from my lips. Then I stepped in to the wall beside her to reassure her as to what I intended to do. How she should understand that I was not an enemy, if she believed enemies surrounded her, I was at a loss for the instant to

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know. She must have heard me shouting. She could not have stood there silent in the dark and listened to my mad bellowings without gathering something of my character. That was what I took for granted.

I felt her shoulder against my arm. She was shorter by some inches, and of delicate frame. I knew that instinctively, too, by the way she leaned against me. She seemed sure she could trust me, from the very first. And I tried to make her certain that I would be worthy of trust, by standing perfectly quiet for a long moment; and I held on to the slender little hand and thrilled with the sense of my strange situation, while I pressed her fingers gently.

She let her hand lie quiet for as much as sixty long seconds. Then she withdrew it and I felt her take my sleeve in her fingers and draw me toward her. I stooped and she whispered to me again, her breath on my cheek.

"They must have heard you," she said. "We'd better go back as far as we can."

"What does it mean?" I queried in response.

I felt her shudder, for I had taken her hand again.

"Oh, it's horrible," she answered. "You saw the motor-boat?"

"Yes," said I, and cursed under my breath.

She turned back from the wharf door and drew me with her. We held hands like two children. I trusted to her guidance, too, as if I had known her all my life and was in a dark drawing-room, merely, instead of on a tough river-front where one murder at least had been committed within the hour.

We went slowly. The darkness was as impenetrable as if a curtain of opaque fabric had been lowered before our eyes. But the footing was better than it had been on the dock, and the girl knew what she was doing. She must have come that way before, certainly. Wonder as to who and what she was shared my mind with the horror at what I had witnessed just before I found her. But I must follow her and wait to be satisfied. Impulse to give immediate alarm and to get the police to clear up that dark deed, at which she as well as I must have looked, was all very well, but there was no call for me to run blindly into needless risk. I could do no good if I simply succeeded in getting myself sand-bagged and flung into the stream.

STRANGE sensation indeed to be led by a girl whom, so far as I knew, I had never seen or heard of, into a gulf of blackness of which I was ignorant, except that it seemed to be the interior of a warehouse. I had the sense of unreality, of course. But I followed on in perfect docility, awaiting her own good time for explanation. Was she saving me from a menace or was she in need of help and taking the first that came to hand? What errand could have brought her to this place? What manner of woman was she?

I had heard of feminine criminals who were delicate women, women of apparent refinement. What could I expect of a woman who stood in the background of a scene of crime? Natural questions, all of them. They raced through my mind unanswered and left no real trace behind, for at no moment did I believe her to be anything but the girl of quality out of place—strangely out of place. Talk of women's intuitions! A man's are quite as keen when it comes to judgment of women.

We were perhaps fifty feet from the door we had entered when she stopped. She reached out both hands and fumbled to put them on my shoulders. Then she backed me, as she might have backed some great animal pet, away from the path we had been traveling, whatever it was, and into a niche in the brick wall that I took to be another doorway. My heels came into contact with a door or a deeper wall of brick and she pushed my shoulders against it also. Then she stood close to me and spoke, still in the lowest breath of a whisper.

"I saw them get into the boat," she said, without preliminary.

"Who are they?" I asked, the sense of the mystery of all this deepening.

"I don't know. Thieves, I think."

"How did you happen——?"

"Please, don't, now!" she interrupted. "I will explain, if opportunity ever offers."

"How long have you been here?"

"I don't know. It seems hours. I think it must have been half an hour. I followed a girl here, who was being mistreated."

"You followed her?"

"Yes—from the settlement."

Light seemed to break in upon me. She was a settlement worker then.

"I heard there was some girl in trouble," said I. "Do you know that an officer has been shot?"

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I felt the little shudder in her small frame again, for she was fairly clinging to me.

"Yes," she breathed. "I saw it!"

"You saw it!"

"I could not help it. But I was not near enough to prevent it even at sacrifice of myself. I did not understand what they meant to do."

"Who are *they?*"

"There are at least four men. They have a motor-boat into which they tried to put the girl. She may be in it now. The police officer followed one of the men here and one of the others shot him. I don't know which one. They all looked alike to me in the darkness, except one who is very heavy in the body and terribly strong."

"Who is the girl?"

"Her name is Laura Lee. I only heard them speak it."

"I heard that Detective Mather was shot on the bridge," I said.

"He was," she replied. "He came down here and then went on to the next street. One man from this gang followed him and shot him on the stair at the other end of the wharf, so that he fell into the water."

"Without any warning?"

"Without any warning."

"And you could not give any?"

"I had no idea—oh, God! I did not dream it till too late!"

That rang true. So did the convulsive clasp of her hands upon my arm, if I may be allowed the expression. She still stood close against me and still we whispered:

"Why did they kill him?"

"I have no idea."

"They were threatened at the moment?"

"I suppose that must have been it."

"Then who was the man in the river—that man the motor-boat ran down?"

She sobbed with sudden breaking of her nerve:

"Did it run him down? Oh, how awful! But—but I believe that was Mather! I believe they did not kill him with the shot."

"Impossible!" I spoke aloud, forgetful in my excitement of the need for silence.

She thrust her hand into my face instantly.

"For the love of life, be still!" she breathed.

I LISTENED. It was more quiet in here where we now stood than it had been by the quiet stream. Not a sound of any other human being came to us. We two were alone of all the living world—companions who were strangers to each other. My purpose was honest. What was hers?

"What shall we do?" I asked her. I wanted to test the truth of her. I did not really doubt, but experience would intrude ideas of caution.

"We cannot get out of here yet," she answered promptly. "There is a man at the street door."

"Are we in a warehouse?"

"No; it is a brick passage through the lower part of a warehouse. It is used by one of the passenger-boat companies for baggage. I heard them say so."

"How do you know it is guarded?"

"I heard them post guards."

"Have you been in here all the time since the shooting?"

"Yes."

"But the motor-boat is gone. Perhaps the sentinel has left, also. There is no reason why they should stay here now, is there?"

"Unless they stayed to make sure of the policeman in the river. It seemed like that."

I could not understand it. She spoke clearly and concisely about the fearful tragedy. She showed emotion enough, perhaps. But what manner of woman was she? Up came that question again and again, as if it mattered most to me what might be the character of the girl who had reached out to take some of the threads of my life into her hands.

"But we can't stay here indefinitely," I commented, wondering, indeed, what else I could do under the circumstances.

If the man in the river had indeed been Mather—and I could trace a possible resemblance of the white face I had seen to the detective's as I knew it—then it was too late for our alarm to do him any good. It was our first duty to take care of ourselves and let our testimony wait.

If I had been alone I think I should have tried to make a run out of the place by one or other of the doors, for the idea that the criminals who had already done such deeds that night might be getting away scot free made my heart burn. I reflected,

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however, that if I had been alone I should not now have been here in this trap. I should have been out on the wharf, or in the river with a bullet in my back or a broken skull. I stood still and thought about that. Then I put my own hands on the girl's arms and held them, with the wish to show her more gentleness. She must be frightened, terribly shocked and frightened, despite her self-control. Of what had I been thinking, in my suspicion that she was not all she represented herself to be?

"They must have heard you call," she whispered to me again presently.

"They must indeed," said I.

"They will be looking for you, then."

"I suppose so. Will they look in here?"

"Won't they?"

They would, if they were intelligent human beings. What chance had we, then? None at all, if men who were desperate and who suspected that they had been seen should make a light by which to see us. I weighed the chances of their making a search for us. They would surely do so. Whether they were cognizant of the girl's presence here I had no idea. From what she said, I could see no reason to think they were. But what did I know as to how she might have exposed herself? Had she even told me the whole of her story? There was a persistent doubt of that in my mind —unreasonable, perhaps, but persistent.

I did not answer her question. I listened instead, instinctively waiting to see what move our hidden enemy might make. And I tried to believe that less than twenty minutes before I had been sitting in a deserted local-room, hoping that I would get no more assignments that night, and reading Scott's great story. How strange that I should have been shaken out of my imaginary world of fiction, as it were, to fall with such tremendous suddenness into a world of such startling, such hideous fact! It might have been easy to believe that I was dreaming it all, had I not the smooth velvet coat under my hands and the gentle pressure of this girl's fingers upon my arms.

AND then, suddenly, from out of the darkness somewhere back on the way we had come, a sound came in to us that made an end of our whisperings. The scuff of a foot! Yes, that was it, unmistakably. Then the sound of other whisperings, and the stealthy tread of feet! The scrape of something against the bricks!

I felt the girl shrink and clasp me tighter. Never before had I faced such a crisis. And the thought came to me that, after to-night, I should know of what stuff my courage was made. I was frightened. Why deny it? I have yet to know the man who feels no thrill of fear. But I was not panic-stricken. I felt a heat in my brain, and my thoughts were clear. I seemed to see possibilities in flashes of illumination just beyond my eyes in the darkness there.

I saw what a fight in the blind gloom might mean; how the chances were better for the man who was alone than they could have been in the light. I felt only too certain that a fight was coming. I was thankful that I was at least forewarned. And, with the girl beside me, I felt a dull rising anger at the brutal menace to such a little creature. Tenderness, born simply of the appeal to my masculine prowess to protect her, rose in me till I had the sense of proprietorship in odd degree.

Perhaps it was only the most natural thing in the world that I should put my arms around her, and draw her close into the niche, till my body was before hers and shielding her from first contact with what was coming. And I held her as something dear to me—as if she had always been dear—and she clung to me, as she had been clinging, indeed, but with convulsiveness, as if she were sure of the refuge provided her clasp held firm. And she seemed not to realize at all that I was to her as if from the very antipodes. No, she seemed not to care. She had made me her protector, and she clung.

And out in the darkness a foot scuffed again, and a curse, vicious and indecent and cruel, came to our ears, with all the horrid meaning obscene profanity can carry. And a light—matchlight—flashed, thirty or forty feet away and made a lurid little halation in the dark.

CHAPTER III

FIGURES IN THE DARK

SUSPENSE is the essence of fear. Have you ever felt the threat of death hang over you when you could not reach out to meet it? Have you ever known what it is to face the next moment of your life with

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the certainty that it holds a deadly peril, but without means to strike first, to anticipate by a breath the thing that overhangs, even to hasten its blow? It is a moment of that sort that tries the nerve.

I had not lived the life of an adventurer. My little experiences had been of the sort any boy may have who follows the craft I had chosen. I was not even a fighting boy at school. I believe that most boy-fights —and man-fights, too—of the kind a lad has who enjoys a decent upbringing are innocuous affairs that teach the participators nothing but disgust of the method of violence. Wholesome to that extent, certainly. They do not harden—those chance quarrels—for real battles that involve vital things.

I was not a veteran in any sense. I was just a boy, of simple affections and simple passions. But one of the simplest of the passions born in us is the fierce resentment of cruelty. I honestly think that was the thing that took the place of courage in me that night.

But I was impatient. I could not stand still when a pause came in the progress of our enemies toward us. They stopped out there in the open passage, where the match-light burned. Whether they consulted, whether they feared something on their own account, whether they were unfamiliar with their ground and dared not come on rapidly, I do not know. At any rate, they stopped short with the lighting of their match. And I, after the light had flared up and gone out—showing me two faces, indistinctly seen—bent eagerly forward and peering, could not bear to stand and wait.

I watched while the little flame of the match rose and sank and gleamed to a spark. Then I listened to the grind of a boot-heel on the boards, as the last bit of fire was crushed out on the floor. After that, for a minute, I contained myself, standing there and wishing with all my soul that I might rush the sneaking assassins and deal in action rather than in waiting for the brief moment I might have to choose. My very muscles tingled at the thought.

What blows I could strike in the dense shadow! How amazed would be my enemies—they were already my enemies, though they knew me not. What relief it would be to leap at them and swing with all the force of my stout young body, and feel the flesh of them against knuckles at least! How I longed for a weapon—something heavy and deadly and sure! But I could not stand still.

I put the girl gently aside and bent till my lips were against her hair. Even in that moment, when I had not looked upon her face, I felt the conviction that she was lovely, and the vivid realization of her nearness was a thing to stir me quite apart from our situation.

"Please stand still, just where you are," I told her, unable myself to hear the sound of it. "I shall not desert you," I added.

And she stood away from me readily, trustfully, I thought.

I stepped out from the wall. What I meant to do was not to follow the wild dictates of my fuming desires. I meant to make a try in quite another direction. I felt that the only sane, reasonable thing to do was to make my way to the door at the street end of the passage and test the truth of the girl's surmise about the sentinel there. I would move quickly and put our fate to the touch, before I returned to give rash battle to a pair of armed villains, with my bare hands.

I swung around and started to move forward. I took a score of swift but soft steps. I suppose the street door must have been somewhere within another fifty feet of where I was. My recollection of the depth of the buildings in that block made me believe the guess accurate. But before I could cover more than half of that space I heard sounds again, this time from directly in front of me and from new prowlers of the dark, apparently.

IT SEEMED to me at first that some sort of struggle had suddenly commenced in the street outside the entrance I had imagined to be there. I heard smothered exclamations, hard breathings echoing like whisperings in a barrel, then the tread of several pairs of feet. But after a second in which I listened as if to a sentence of doom, I saw the faintest sign of a light. Then abruptly an electric flash-light showed for an instant, and my eyes took in a group of men as the plate in the camera grasps its image in the instantaneous flick of the shutter.

There were four of them. I caught so many figures at least. I was not sure there were not more. But one or two more or

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less seemed immaterial just then. They stood close together between the brick walls of our passage and appeared as if huddled close in anticipation of danger. Still they did not seem to be looking ahead of them very carefully, and I was sure that neither the light nor any of the eyes of the men had been directed toward me.

But one thing made sharp impression on my vision and on my mind. That was that they were carrying between them or among them some heavy burden, to the weight of which they were all bending more or less, as if the thing were taxing unaccustomed muscles. When the light went out again, as it did promptly, I turned the lingering image of the group over and over in my mind, as one might a curious picture held in the hand, and tried to examine the strange object they carried. It had hung from their hands close to the floor, a shapeless mass.

At first I leaped to the conclusion that it must be some sort of plunder, in a huge bundle. But the notion did not satisfy me; why, I cannot tell. There were outlines of a roundness that did not suggest packages of valuables in the way of goods obtainable in this neighborhood. At least I could not fit the vision to any ideas I could form, in my intense excitement, as to possible loot. I was strangely concerned about it, however, though I did not pause to consider at that moment the oddity of my course of thought.

I backed against the wall again, under the drive of instinct. Escape through that door was cut off for the time, certainly. And the men coming down the passage, whoever they were or whatever they might be carrying, could hardly fail to discover me. Surely they would find me immediately, if they turned on the light again. I could understand that they might be chary of the light, however, and therein lay the only hope I cherished.

I might strike as I had considered striking at the other party, or I might rush and pass them and so get out and summon aid in the street, thereby causing a diversion in favor of the girl. So I held my breath and tried to plan, and gathered my muscles for action.

And then all at once, without conscious thought, I grasped the truth as to what the thing was in their hands. What could those heavy curves in their burden be other than the curves of some inert body of a human being?

But they did not pause to let me think. They came on. Shuffling, striving obviously for silence, but handicapped by the weight of the thing they bore and the lack of light they were evidently unwilling to use, they could not avoid plain sounds that warned me of their movements. And I stood flat against the rough bricks, feeling the pulse in my throat and the boyish tremble in my knees, which, I am ready to affirm, was not fear so much as overpowering nervous tension. My nerves were like quivering wires, taut but stirred by the wind. If to tremble is a sign of cowardice, the man of nerves must always be a coward, but I think better of nerves than that. The man who trembles and stays is none of your cowards.

CHAPTER IV

ALIAS MALLETT

THEY came slowly, whispering intermittently, cursing occasionally, berating some sort of ill-luck that had attended their enterprise, for a word or two could be caught in the otherwise complete silence. And I felt their approach, as one feels a presence or the proximity of an object he cannot see. I actually reached the point of impatience at their slowness before I began to get sentences of what they said.

"Where did he go?"

That was the first clear question I heard. I recall it well enough. What a harsh thing a whisper is! And how it may linger in the memory!

And then the answer:

"He ducked."

They paused a few feet from me, how far I could not judge.

"Was it Mallett?"

"Yes," was the answer, with another curse.

"He's a quitter. I knew it," came a wheezy comment.

It meant little to me. They seemed to be commenting on the absence of the guard at the door. They had missed him, then, of course. But suddenly there leaped into my brain an idea that came full grown, like the mythical warriors sprung from the dragon's teeth. I did not even pause to consider it, for the only thing that suggested itself as an alternative to passive waiting

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for discovery and death lay in the prosecution of the daring notion. Almost without my own conscious volition, I felt myself stepping out into the very path of them in the darkness.

"Here I am!" said I.

Ah, a whisper has its virtues! Not the least of them is the absence of personality, such as the tone of a voice possesses.

They stood still and waited. Then sharply came the inevitable query.

"Mallett?"

"Yes," I whispered hoarsely, a mighty heave of emotion making it almost impossible for the single sibilant rasp of breath to get through my throat and teeth.

Somebody grunted. I waited for the light, but it did not come. They waited still, whispering unintelligibly, but they did not turn the deadly ray upon me.

"Where you been?" some one asked, instead.

Was my ruse a momentary success? I breathed like a man who has escaped suffocation.

"Inside," I answered.

"Why didn't you stay at the door?"

"Some one came up and I thought they were coming in."

I heard a chuckle, then a contemptuous sniff. Then another question.

"Where's Griff?"

"Outside," I ventured, feeling the sweat start on my face and the cold clammy feeling of wet in my clothing. Then, "Shall I lend a hand?"

"Nix," said my interrogator. "Go ahead."

I stood still. What I wanted was that they should pass me. I wanted not even a little to go with them back to the wharf door. But I saw nothing but to comply. I turned.

"Wait," said the other whisperer.

I stopped.

"Give me your gun," came the order.

I choked down a gasp, and reached into my subconscious intelligence, if there is such a thing, for a suggestion.

"I gave it to Griff," I said, and clenched my hands to strike first if the lie proved too transparent.

"To Griff! What for?" demanded the other.

"He dropped his in the river," I supplemented.

"In the river!"

A breathless silence intervened. Then there was another snicker. "That pet gun!" somebody commented.

Some one moved in the group. I heard a tip-toeing footstep. Next moment a man stood close at my side. He reached out and touched me. My muscles leaped under the contact and I nearly struck. I had all I could do not to yield to the insane impulse.

"Say," said the fellow. "Did Griff leave you in here without a gun?"

"Yes," I answered.

He laughed in a faintly audible chuckle. "Well, then," he said, "go back to the door of the wharf and get Griff."

But he held my arm. Presently I heard his chuckle again.

"Hm!" he muttered. "Scared stiff, ain't you?"

"No," said I.

"You lie," he said calmly. "You're shaking like a cat-tail in a gale of wind."

"I'm colder'n a frozen chicken."

"Aw!" he said, and gave me a turn and a push toward the wharf-door. "Git!"

I STARTED and walked with legs that seemed to be stiff with the very cold I had feigned. Then a sudden thought came to me. There was still opportunity to do one thing—one great thing! Perhaps I could maneuver to guard the niche in which my little companion stood. Would my luck serve me to that extent? But for her presence there in the passage ahead I would have tried to run through the men and make a get-away by the very suddenness of my move.

If I could manage that the whole party should pass the recess in which she nestled, she would have at least the chance to run out and away behind us. Whether she would grasp the knowledge that the way lay open, I could not guess. Whether she would take the opportunity I gave her, even if she did understand it, I could only hope. There was no way to give her a hint.

I lingered beside the chap who had given me my orders. He pushed me again.

"Go on!" he commanded.

I moved slowly. I loitered, as he went back to his companions. Presently I heard their shuffling walk and their low whisperings. I waited deliberately till they came up with me. One of them brushed into me and swore aloud in startled fashion.

"Look out!" said I quickly. "There's a

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loose board or something by the right-hand wall here. I fell over it a minute ago."

I felt them move out a bit, toward the center of the passage. Then we moved on together.

I had almost forgotten the enemy who had first approached me in the passage. What had become of the two who had burned the match? How they could have stood unrevealed all this time, while we carried on our conversation, I could not imagine. They had, however, and there was now no sign of them.

Silence and absolute blackness was ahead and all about, and the two whose peering faces I had seen were either waiting in dumb secrecy there or had turned back to the dock. What would happen when we met them? Was one of those two the man Griff, whose name I had ventured to speak so confidently? And the other? Who was he? Might he not be the man who had been left to guard the door? Might he not be the Mallett whom I impersonated for the brief moment?

I put out my hand and felt the wall. I walked forward, timing my pace to that of the man nearest to me. He seemed to regard me but little now, and all the others were intent on their task. They dragged slowly along. Slowly my fingers passed from brick to brick as our progress forced me to proceed. Slowly but eagerly I felt for the momentarily expected break in the even wall that should be the niche, where the girl must be cowering, in a fear like unto death.

I felt the sandy dust of mortar on my fingers and in my palm. It was my unbandaged hand that had this duty to perform for me, and I kept it out like a blind man's stick.

Twenty paces I judged I had come toward the doorway of the street, from the hiding-place, where I had left my strangely discovered partner in trouble. It seemed forty at least, before the corner of the brick that marked my arrival at that point again was under my touch. But at last I felt it. My fingers went around it at shoulder height.

I speculated whether the girl would remain passive under my hand, when it should be felt, whether she would start and scream, whether I could convey any sort of message to her by a pat and a push toward the outer door. Then I stepped into the niche a bit, with my arm at full extent to touch the back wall of it, and went on toward the other side, in momentary expectation of the feel of the velvet coat. It was easy, for the nook was not two feet deep.

I turned my face from the men and dared to whisper into the little cavity, hoping that if I were heard by the cut-throats, they could not grasp what I said or meant.

"Don't be afraid," I breathed, intending the words to reach her ear alone. "Go back to the street and run!"

And then I felt for her shrinking form—and felt again. I did not find it. I felt the bricks only under my hand. And I took another step, and another, and still only bricks. I lowered my hand and swept the space, a throb of terror wrenching my heart. And still I felt only bricks. And then, suddenly, my knuckles struck against the opposite side of the niche!

I stopped and stood still, and the man behind me came quite abreast of me while I reached both hands from side to side of the place. And I hardly knew that he grasped my arm as conviction seized my brain that the place was empty. The girl was gone!

CHAPTER V

CRASH!

THE surprise of it was so great that I lost my craft. I resisted the hand that laid itself on my arm. I shook it off and turned again to look for the figure that I was certain must be in the niche. I swept the whole interior of the little space with my two hands, careless of the fact that the man beside me swore suspiciously and put his hand again upon me and roughly. But I could not choose to disregard him long, for he was roused now and alarmed.

"Here, you!" he growled aloud, "what are you doing?" And then, when I did not reply promptly, "Here, Blaney, open that light. Something's doing here!"

Confused, I thought only of turning at bay rather than attempting a bold blow or dash for freedom. I whirled and put my back against the wall in the niche. Instantly thereafter the light rushed into my face and blinded me so that I could not see the figures behind it!

It was no tiny ray of illumination now,

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but a great flash of clear light that must have shown me to them from head to heels. I could make out one hulking fellow in colorless clothes, standing at the left of the ray that came upon me, but his face was not distinctly seen. And then came the prompt blow that crashed down upon my head, mercilessly, brutally, and that was as surely intended to kill me as was any blow ever struck.

I felt a blasting burst of lightning bolts in my head. A stab of cruel pain went from neck to feet and I crumpled down like a dead thing, indeed, and all knowledge went from me for the time. But I could not have been unconscious long, for I was awake enough to hear running feet and other commotion, as it seemed almost immediately, and knew that the situation had changed only a little.

I have understood since that I owed my life to the fact that the fellow who struck me overreached with the bludgeon he used and hit the wall behind my head, so that a part of the force of the blow was expended on the bricks. But when consciousness was mine again I knew that some diversion had also arisen to distract further attention from me, for the men were not standing over me, and the commotion was unmistakably a struggle of some sort.

I was strangely without the sense of pain, and felt my strength return to me enough so that I could sit up cautiously and lean against the wall and listen. And almost at once a shot rang out in the hollow space somewhere toward the wharf-door. And then there were wild curses and sounds of fighting.

I heard a man groan as in mortal agony and I heard a body hit the floor, and another shot snapped spitefully and a bullet ricochetted down the passage with a nasty buzz like a bee at the very ear. And there came another gasp of pain and a sickening sense that some other man had received a vital wound.

It was hideous to listen to. May a kind Providence spare me from ever again standing by helplessly at a mortal fight, to listen while men die. The death sob is too cruel a thing to remember. I struggled to my feet and found that I could stand. I walked tremblingly forward, and actually felt the blood begin to flow in my arteries, as if it had been suspended for minutes.

Still the fight went on. Once the light flashed and there stood out before me a scene like the scrimmage on a football field; except that, as the light died again as suddenly, the rose stream of pistol flame cut across the picture once more.

But it was as if my thought had not left the girl. Strange hold, indeed, had she taken of me, for though I knew clearly and well that I could now turn and flee with every chance that I should find an uninterrupted course to and into the street, I scarcely considered it. I knew that that girl must still be in the passage, unless some miracle had happened. I could scarcely credit my senses that she was not still in the niche itself. But she was not there.

HOW and where she had gone were mysteries beyond ready solving, for I and my captors had stood in the way of egress to the street, while the two men I had seen at the other end of the passage could hardly have failed to find her if she had tried that way. An arrant coward I would have been, indeed, if I had followed tugging impulse and fled, leaving her somewhere in close proximity to that fighting crew. The thought of a gentlewoman in that bloody murder crush was enough to make me forget that I had been hurt. My hurt was not great, so I have no heroism of which to boast. But I went toward the battle rather than away from it, with the one purpose in my heart of standing by the hapless woman who had appealed to me for protection.

But no chance to mingle or to take advantage of the clash offered itself to me. Before I had taken six steps the ghastly sounds of the fight died suddenly, like the roar of machinery when the power is shut off, and it left me with almost the same sense of unreality of silence in the auditory nerves. And the next instant I heard the sound of feet retreating, the whines and growls and panting breaths of the winners of the battle, whoever they were.

And I became sure that, if one party to the mêlée had been members of the police, it had not been upon their banners that victory had perched. Police would have made a light. They would have talked aloud, and they would have summoned support in anticipation of further battle, or help to carry off the victims of the fray. No sounds or signs of such activities followed. There were simply retreating footsteps.

I paused for a moment to listen again.

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Could the girl be with this gang now? Could she have been in the thick of that fight? And then a sudden notion that the men whom I had earlier seen in the wharf-end of the passage might have been officers of the law, and that the girl by some chance might have run to them, filled me with hope for a single second. It died quickly, for, if she had been with the defeated party, she was now either among the victims left on the field, or she was again in the hands of the enemy.

There was only one thing to do, and that could not be done too quickly. As the retreating men swept out of the end of the passage, and sounds convinced me that the coast was for the moment clear, I ran forward with caution but with all the haste I dared. I felt in my pocket for a match and struck it, hoping that it would swiftly reveal what I wanted to see.

The little flame lighted a wide faint circle on the floor, and I saw dark bodies lying there, one with white, distorted face turned upward as if it grinned at me, the other on bent limbs as if kneeling with forehead down like an Oriental maker of prayers. And both were silent witnesses to the efficiency of blows that are ruthless. They were dead, if a glance could decide that question, and one of them was dressed in the garb of the city police, while on the breast of the other—he of the upturned face—showed the star of the plain-clothes man, half uncovered in his disordered clothing.

But no woman was with them. The floor about them was clear, except for stains that need no explaining. And my match-light died and left my chief question unanswered.

I stood still for a long moment over the bodies. I could not decide what was wise. Undoubtedly the alarm of this fight had spread. Several shots had been fired and there had been noise enough to reach far into quiet streets, if not to the bridge itself where the absorbed crowd had searched for the first victim of this night's tragedies.

My brain swam for an instant as I realized how the scythe of the gaunt reaper had cut deadly close to me, again and yet again in the half hour's time, since I had laid my novel face down on my typewriter-desk in the humdrum local-room of my paper and run out to get a story. Well, here was a story! But would I ever write it?

Of one thing I was certain. I need not hasten to give alarm and to tell my tale to the police. They would be here presently. I had but one thing that need occupy me. Inclination and duty to the little companion who had trusted me not to quit her might be followed. So I did not wait. I ran forward with more boldness.

CHAPTER VI

A BLOW FOR A BLOW

I WAS half way to the wharf entrance of the place and I could see faint sign of a dimly lighter tone in the square hole of the door, when it occurred to me that I was missing an opportunity. The chances were that one at least of the men on the floor might still have about him some kind of a weapon, of no further use to his helpless hands, but of great possible service to me.

I wheeled instantly and ran back, hoping that I could find a gun or a baton. As I ran I felt for another match and found one. When I came near where the bodies lay, I struck my light and looked again at them.

They lay as they had before, except that I saw them from a new standpoint and with less horrid sense of shock at the sight; and therefore I took in more details under the yellow flare of my tiny taper. I bent down to the uniformed officer, as the one least likely to have drawn his gun, and therefore to have lost it. I felt of his big hip and met disappointment. Then I turned him and searched further and carefully. Neither pistol nor club were on his person.

I turned to the other man and went through the same process, with unavoidable sense of the ghoulishness of it upon me. But I had no better success. If they had been armed at all—and the thought that they had not was absurd—they had been stripped of their weapons with almost inconceivable swiftness.

The sight and knowledge of the thing gave me a sudden sense of startling capability on the part of the men who had done the trick. They could not only fight—they could think! They had thought to take advantage of the fruits of victory, even such small fruits, when they must be conscious of the terrible risk they ran in delaying after the racket of the fatal struggle. They must have small respect for the promptness or the prowess of the city police. They must be daring criminals. Reckless,

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wholesale murderers they already seemed.

I stood there in the darkness again over the dead officers and recalled the man in the river, the body in the sack, the blow struck at my own life, and wondered if the scythe had yet finished its swath. I was outside of the swing for a time, where would another hour's end find me?

But I lighted another match to look once more over the blood-dyed floor, for the chance that one weapon had fallen beyond the reach of the enemy. I held the flame in the hollow of my hands, and saw by its light that the handkerchief I had tied about the palm of the left was red with my own blood. But I felt no pain in the wound the nail had inflicted, and I cared not at all for that trivial thing now. How trivial indeed it seemed in the light of what had happened since I had received it!

I stooped and looked about carefully, using my sound hand as a reflector and spreading the reach of my search as far as the walls on either side and a half dozen feet each way in the passage. Not a single article of any kind that had fallen from the men who had fought here, was to be seen.

I turned away disappointed. But as I let the glowing coal of the match fall to the floor and was about to set my foot upon it, a glint of some shining thing showed under the bent knee of the big patrolman. I leaned over him and felt for it in the ensuing darkness, and presently I had in my hands a queer, pliant thing, the nature of which I was slow to recognize at first, till my fingers came in contact with a plainly recognizable portion, and I knew it by a clasp at the top for a woman's dragon-scale silver purse.

It held its own significance. The chain, which had been a long one, was broken, but the tiny thing held some substantial materials, money or handkerchief, or both. A faint, sweet scent came up from it to me, and I was suddenly conscious that I paused to inhale it with a queer sense of recognition. I am not a sentimentalist, but I knew that perfume. Why? It had been in my nostrils once before that tragic night.

I turned, thinking with sudden poignancy of the soft clinging little creature I had held in my arms, and of the strange chance appeal from her that had involved me so deeply. And something more than mere chivalry tugged at my sympathy. It was pitiful indeed that such a gentle being should be in any way concerned in such doings as I had seen that night. Whoever and whatever she was, she needed a friend, and I found myself more than willing to be that friend. Old appeal of woman to man, dependent, clinging feminine to masculine pride of strength! How it grips! It is woman's first hold upon us. It had laid hold on me, and I had not seen the face of the girl who had put the thrall upon me.

I PRESSED forward now toward the wharf doorway. I slipped the little purse into my pocket and thought with a thrill that the day might come when I should use this clue to her identity. And then the horror of her probable situation came over me once more and I was filled with a sudden leaping determination to strike and fight and kill, if need be, in her cause.

I crept along with greater caution than I had been using, as I began to realize that craft might be the thing that would win where violence promised so little. I was prepared now to be bold. I felt that I had cast my chances and my life into the balance for the time, to try to save the little lady who had chosen to make me her knight, and I was not afraid as I had been before. I only wanted not to lose a chance to serve her.

I reached the door this time without mishap or encounter. There I found surprisingly light the night that I had before considered so black. With my eyes used to the darkness of the perfectly rayless interior, the river seemed to me to be shimmering with faint radiance. I think there was really more light than there had been, for there were torches at the bridge now, where they were still searching for the body of Dan Mather, without apparent concern for the new tragedies half a block away. I looked out toward them, and then at the newer things, and wondered if some of my senses must not after all be playing me tricks. For it seemed impossible that shots and cries of death and agony should go so utterly unregarded. Was I in delirium after injury, or was I in the horrible reality of an amazing experience?

I had sense enough to act upon the latter hypothesis, such as it was. I peered about with care. Therefore I saw three black figures at the edge of the wharf much engaged with some engrossing task, and knew them presently for the men who had passed

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me in the dark. And they were laughing! I shiver now at the notion of it! They were laughing and making some half audible joke about the police and the people at the bridge looking for Dan Mather!

They were working with some heavy things which they were heaving toward the edge of the dock. What were they? I remembered the man in the sack. Could they be burying another victim of their savagery in this gloom-ridden river? And what of the girl? How much better off was she than the men they had met, if she chanced to figure as a witness against them for their bloody crimes? Was she there in their hands? If so, what would they do with her? And what chance had she to have escaped them? Here in my pocket was the purse that must have belonged to her, found nearer the door of the wharf than we had approached after our first flight from it. She could hardly have dropped it on the way in!

But I had not long to measure probabilities by half known facts. I heard a cry! It was the voice of a girl, sweet, plaintive, pitiful, frightened. It was not loud, but it was full of the tremulousness of terror. Of course I leaped to the conclusion that it was she, my little friend of the half-hour before, and I was near to running out at once to try for a desperate rescue or to attract attention to our plight. Still I held back. A blow on the head for each of us or a knife-thrust apiece would end it all for the girl and me if I did that. The criminals would have quite as good a chance to escape after two more killings as they had now, and they would not hesitate to drown our evidence against them.

I could not stand still, however, and risk the thing I feared, that two humans at least were suffering the fate I anticipated as my reward for interference. If they were dropping living creatures over into that deep, cold river, I had no excuse to hold my peace. I watched only a minute, then I made up my mind that I had seen enough of what was going forward. I stepped out on the wharf, picking the man I would rush first, a burly fellow who seemed to be directing matters.

But as I went out from under the doorway I saw two of the men shift position suddenly, and one of them turned his head so that I heard his voice distinctly and understood what he said:

"The *Red Ghost* can run away from any boat they got," he remarked.

Another laughed slightly. "Pigs!" he commented, looking toward the police boat, still patrolling the waters under the bridge.

For some reason two of them stirred abruptly from their places and walked slowly along the wharf bridgeward. The third stood still a moment. Then he heaved again at the burden they had been apparently trying to handle. He pushed it over the edge of the wharf and lowered it slowly toward the water. An idea filtered into my brain. The motor-boat! It must be there beneath them.

I looked at the two who had gone toward the crowd. They had stopped at just about the limit of my vision and were standing still. I saw opportunity. The man in front of me was bent double over the edge of the dock. I stepped forward to his side in time to see his burden drop into a long, slim shadowy vessel lying close in below. I heard a moan, the man straightened up. I swung my arm and struck him across the back of the neck with all my power! He went over the edge. So did I—into the boat!

CHAPTER VII

ANOTHER DAYLIGHT

I FELL all asprawl. The boat was perhaps seven feet below the top of the dock and I had had no time to calculate the distance. As I dropped I knew that there was at least one more moving figure in the vessel, a figure busy with receiving and stowing the burden the man on the dock had lowered to him. It was my purpose, so far as I had a clear purpose, to leap upon him and send him after the first fellow into the river, if my prowess would avail.

But designs of this sort do not necessarily succeed because they are audacious. In stories, sometimes, great prosperity favors the bold. It is not always so in real life, though boldness is one of the requisites to success. In this particular instance, it got me nothing but a prompt blow on the head, from some heavy weapon, that was more effective than the first I had received. The fellow in the boat must have acted quickly. He must have seen and understood my attack upon his companion on the wharf, for

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he almost caught me in the air with his flail-like smashing return blow. And I went out of consciousness as if the world and everything in it had been blotted out for me.

I have no idea what time it was when this finish came to my evening's wild work and experiences. It was late when Canfield sent me on the assignment that had plunged me into this whirl of sinister activities, and there had been no moment when I had been able to calculate the lapse of time. But it was daylight when I opened my eyes and remembered, with the first heavy ache of a throbbing head and the weary burden of stagnant life in my muscles.

Daylight and quiet! I remember blinking at the window of a room in which I lay on a hard floor, and wondering what had happened to spill me from my usual bed. Then I recognized that the window was on the wrong side of the room for mine at my boarding-house, and recalled quite clearly that there was at least a rug on the floor of that small but commodious place. And then the remembrance of what had passed loomed suddenly up in my mind like an emanation from the throbbing headache itself, and I strove to get it clear while I became immensely alive to all my surroundings.

At first I believed I was back on the warehouse floor, but in some place where the light of day could creep in upon me. I was not long in this delusion, however. My glance about took in white walls, calcimined and fairly clean. I saw a chair or two on the farther side of the room, and some odd boxes that looked as if they had been used as supplementary seats. I saw a door tight shut on the right side of the place. The ceiling was rather low and had no lights dependent from it. And then I noticed that the window was high from the floor, suggesting either a basement room or some high loft of a place.

As my mind rushed over the events to which I had been involuntary witness during the early night, I went over these features of the room again and again, and tried to draw inferences and conclusions of some value. I gradually became conscious of what had not impressed me at first, but which did not greatly surprise me, that I was bound. Both my hands and feet were tied and I knew, without testing them to any great extent, that the bonds were secure. My hands were fastened in front of me and I lay upon my back—had been lying so long in that position, indeed, that I found it hard to stir to another. And I seemed to be alone in the midst of a stillness that was only faintly broken by distant rumblings which I decided must be early trains bringing workaday crowds into the city.

I turned my head in an effort to see back of where I lay while my brain filled with wonder that I was alive at all, when there was a sudden stir behind me and I caught sight of movement close at hand.

I felt the impulse to cower, so expectant was my poor bruised head of new blows. But I looked and saw that beside the wall back of my head another chair was placed and that in it some person was sitting, some person in dark clothing that did not seem to give me a clear impression of the figure. And then, all at once, I understood that the clothing and the figure too were a woman's.

Next moment I heard a voice, low, sweet, fearful, but clear:

"Are you awake?" it asked.

I WAS very much awake by this time, but I found difficulty in saying so. I tried to work myself around so that I could see, and presently I managed it. Then I looked up, with the strain of my twisted position handicapping me, and stared into the face of a girl who sat straight upright in a seat that was provided not so much for her comfort as for a convenient thing to which to fasten her. She was bound from shoulders to ankles by cords that held her helpless, except for a slight turning of her feet and the forward bend of her head.

She was small. The chair she occupied was an old-fashioned, straight-arm, rocking-chair, such as is found nowadays nowhere but in old-fashioned places or among the discards. Her hands lay upon the arms and were tied securely to them. She did not fill the space between them by considerable, and she looked pitifully little and helpless and frail to my first sweeping glance.

And then, having looked in her face again, I saw that she was lovely. She was pale and there was a little drawn look about her lips, but the face was sweet and refined and delicate and its lines were full of beauty. More than that, there was in it that piquant interest that an alert mind only can give

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the face of woman or man. She was dark, with fine clear eyes, bright even now with spirit and with ready intelligence. Her lips were full and red but firm and clean-cut, like the thoroughbred she seemed. Her hair was almost black. It was in some disorder and she was hatless, but the wavy wisps fell about her face with a charm of the sort prim neatness can never impart.

I suppose my stare was of the rudest. But the confusion of thoughts was not unnatural, I think. It was not too slow in finding expression, however.

"Are you the girl of the warehouse?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered promptly. "And you are the man who helped me. I knew it."

"I helped you little enough," said I. "Do you know where we are now?"

"No."

"Are you hurt?" I inquired anxiously. My own throbbing head would scarcely let me think.

"No. Are you badly injured? Oh, they treated you cruelly!"

"They seem to have tried to break my head," said I.

"You followed me," she commented, in a quiet tone, but with an inflection that stirred me.

"Were you in the motor-boat?" I asked.

"Yes."

"How did you get away from the door where we stopped in the passage?"

"I saw the policeman and ran toward him. He made me keep still and go to the door of the wharf. But before I had been there a minute a man caught hold of me and carried me to the boat. I couldn't even scream. He covered my mouth and told me he would throw me into the river if I did. And then they began shooting, and it was such a short time afterward that several men came. And then they put a gag in my mouth and some horrible cloth thing over my head and dropped me over into the boat."

"Then you were there when I jumped in?"

"You did jump in, then? I thought so. But I could not tell what was happening. There were so many jars and jolts, and so much cursing and swearing and scuffling. One man fell overboard and was nearly drowned. I heard enough to understand."

"I hope I had a hand in that," said I.

"But they are holding you to question you about something," she went on. "They talked about you a great deal after the boat started away from the place. Do you belong to the police?"

"No," said I. "I am a newspaper-man."

"They think you belong to the detective force. And they would not drop you into the water because they wanted to find out something from you to-day."

"How did you know it was I they talked about?" I queried.

"I didn't till now. But I followed enough of what they said, so that I could tell it was the man they left here in the room with me whom they wanted to question."

She looked at me with solicitude, for me and my plight, plainer in her face than anxiety over her own condition. I regarded her earnestly.

"Do you know where we are?" I asked again.

"No, except that we came up some long stairs to get here. I think that it must be the top floor of some warehouse and I have the notion that it faces the river, for I have heard the whistles of the tugs too distinctly for them to be very far away."

"I see," said I.

IT WAS easy to anticipate what would happen to me if questions were to be asked me that I could not answer, while my foes entertained the notion that I was of the police and preserved my life simply for the information they hoped to get. It was not encouraging.

"You must be about ill with all this exposure and violence," I said, looking in pity at her.

"I am not ill," she replied, briefly.

"Did they hurt you?"

"Not seriously. They were surprisingly restrained in their methods with me—almost gentle."

She smiled faintly, and the little seeming effort at humor spoke volumes for the fiber of her.

"You are brave," I commented, with admiration leaping up and the same feeling I had experienced before taking a strange grip of me as I watched her.

"I am not so much frightened now, though perhaps I have more reason to be," she answered. Then she shivered a little. "One can get used to so much," she added.

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"Are we guarded?" I questioned, striving to look toward the door.

"I cannot tell," she said. "Sometimes I think we are not, but why should we be left without a sentinel?"

"Why should we be left ungagged?"

"I think that is because we are so far from help that we could not be heard if we did cry out. They told me they would kill us both if we tried it, and as the gag would kill me anyway in a little while, I am willing to keep still till I see a better chance to scream than now."

Again she smiled a bit, and my heart went out to her.

"Would you mind telling me about yourself, now?" I asked, gently.

She looked at me hesitatingly, as if half afraid of the question.

"You took me for your protector." I could not help saying it aloud, because I had thought it again.

"Yes," she said, "I did." A faint color stole up into her cheeks. "I heard you shrieking curses on the heads of the men in the boat after they ran down the poor fellow—in the river."

Her voice was firm for the most part, but it broke a bit over this. She closed her eyes and leaned back against the head of her chair. Her face was beautiful in outline and feature in the growing light, and I marveled at her, at our amazing situation and at the threat hanging over us both—our joint danger.

"And you thought I must be a man because I cursed those murderers?" I asked.

"Of course I knew you were not of them."

"And you proceeded to save my life," said I.

"I did nothing of the kind. I simply warned you. And then I got you into all the trouble, for you would have gotten away, perhaps, but for me."

"Perhaps," said I grimly, thinking of the man who had lain on the warehouse floor with his grinning white face turned upward. I suddenly remembered the purse I had picked up in that black place of battle.

"I think I have your purse," said I. "It is silver and the chain is broken."

"I had not thought of it," she said.

"But you will tell me about yourself now, won't you, pending my ability to give it to you?"

"There is very little to tell. I came to the city yesterday afternoon from my home in Fairfax. Perhaps you know where that is? I waited some time at the station for my brother, who promised to meet me. He lives in this city. I waited so long that when I tried to telephone his office it was closed, and when no one answered the 'phone at his rooms I was at a loss what to do."

She paused and looked at me with the first show of diffidence she had exhibited. Then she went on:

"We were planning to run out to one of the near-by towns and make a visit for a few days, and the road we were to take comes in at another station than the one at which I had arrived. I made up my mind that I would go to that station, thinking some misunderstanding as to our meeting-place must have arisen. I asked about a cab and they told me the depot I wanted to reach was directly across the river and only a little distance.

"As it was some time after dinner hour now, however, I would not walk alone across the bridge but insisted on the cab. So I got safely over the river and to the other station, where I was disappointed again of finding Ned—my brother. I went into the restaurant there and had some dinner, and then waited for ever so long, becoming more nervous and frightened all the time. I tried to telephone again several times, but could get no one at Ned's rooms. Finally I made up my mind that I had been foolish to come over to the second station, and thought it would do no harm to go back to the first. If I did not find Ned then, I would take a cab to the best hotel near and spend the night there."

SHE stopped again and looked at me with a question in her eyes, but she did not speak it, and presently continued:

"I checked my hand-bag in the parcel-room, and then thinking it would be foolish to take a carriage again for the little distance across the bridge, I ventured to go out and look at the street to see if I dared cross alone. It chanced that a man and a girl were just passing the door of the station as I did so, and I followed them on impulse and crossed the bridge just behind them. But when we reached the other side and before I could get to the station, which was on the opposite side of the street, another man came suddenly out of the bridge road-

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way and joined the two ahead of me. And then, all at once, the two men seized the girl and started around the corner into a dark side street—the street the warehouses are on.

"She did not cry out; but I did. I screamed. And nobody seemed to hear me. I was so frightened that I did not know what to do. The girl had struggled and I knew she was in some terrible trouble, so I felt that I must attract attention and get help instantly. But nobody appeared to notice my cry. I thought that I ought to see, if I could, where the men went in that dark street, and so I dared not run away till I had taken my chance to look after them. Oh, it did not require much courage—and think of that poor girl being carried away! I believe I rather forgot myself for a minute."

She stopped again and I, looking at her delicate face, wondered anew at the courage of frail women in great crises.

"I could not let her be carried away without one effort to help," she said, as if in apology to me. "But I dared not enter the side street. I made out that the figures in the gloom turned in at some doorway—the passage doorway it later proved to be—and I turned away to run back to the railway station. Just at that instant a big man came running from somewhere directly at me, and he pointed a revolver in my very face when he came up, and said he would kill me if I made any more noise. I was so frightened I couldn't make any sound at all, and he caught hold of me and almost carried me toward where the girl had been taken into the passage. I was nearly beside myself with terror, and that is the last I remember till I found myself lying on the floor in the passage alone."

She waited an instant for self-control, then went on:

"When I remembered what had happened and where I must now be, I knew I had fainted, and for some reason the man had dropped me. I followed my strongest impulse, to keep as quiet as I could, and so I waited in most abject fear just inside the doorway. I had not been there more than half a minute, I think, when three or four more men came up and turned into the entrance, and when I heard them whispering together I became so utterly terrorized again that I started back through the passage."

She was growing quite breathless. "Wait," said I. "You are living it all over again and exhausting yourself."

"No," she answered, "I've little more to tell. I ran wildly, madly, through the passage ahead of the men who had come in and I got to the wharf in time to see some one run by the door and toward the bridge. I didn't see that he was an officer till he was past me. And then another man ran out of the darkness and followed him, and shot the officer on the bridge-stairs."

Her eyes were wide with the horror of it, but she paused only a second. "And then I stood at one side of the doorway while the men passed me, talked of the shooting, and finally set guards and went back to the street. And there was nothing left for me to do but to creep back into the passage, and hope to wait in the niche in the wall which I had found, till the men should go and I could get away. I was just starting off again, by the wharf route, when I heard you, and saw the boat run the man down in the river."

CHAPTER VIII

PLANS FOR FREEDOM

THE girl's tale was quite as startling as my own, and, as she had shared the experiences that followed the moment I found her, I had none the better of her in my record. Besides, I was here now and had been on the wharf last night in the line with simple duty, or as the result of that simple duty which I was hired to perform. She was here because she had tried to save two fellow creatures at the risk of her own safety, even of her life!

"Will you tell me your name?" I asked, simply.

"Oh," she answered, "you think I did wrong or acted foolishly!"

"On the contrary, I envy you your record," I told her. "I want to know the name of the girl to whom I owe so much, and who is much the bravest girl I have ever known."

She blushed till the pallor of her tired face was quite obliterated.

"I am not brave," she denied. "I was frightened almost to death. Some of the things I did because I was frightened. Some of them I could not help doing. I couldn't help staying in the passage after I was caught in there, could I?"

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"You could easily have helped following the girl. Have you any idea what has become of her?"

"Yes," she replied slowly. "I think she got away."

"Got away!"

"Yes. They talked about it in the boat. They wanted her because she had given testimony against some one, or was going to give testimony. I believe they only intended, in the first place, to frighten her into giving evidence in favor of them or of some friend in trouble. But I think Detective Mather helped her escape, and then the shooting made the thing assume much more serious aspects."

"You told me her name."

"I heard it spoken. Laura Lee, they called her."

"And yours?"

She looked at me with a little show of timidity again. Then she spoke it frankly.

"Mine is Doris Kingslee," she said.

"Mine is Graham Hawtry," I volunteered. "We seem to be partners in trouble, Miss Kingslee."

"You had a chance to escape," she murmured.

"Would I have done better to have run for help? Perhaps we might not have known where to look for you afterward. And while there is life, you know——"

She did not answer this. She sat regarding me with a sweet expression on her lips and a troubled little frown on her brows. Singularly cool and self-possessed, certainly, was this girl of guarded life, as she must surely have been heretofore. I looked back into her thoughtful eyes and nearly forgot the predicament we were in, in my supreme admiration of her.

But presently she warned me that I was staring too boldly. Her eyes fell and the color mounted again, and I looked away ashamed.

"There is no reason why we should simply stay here and wait passively for these cut-throats to work their will upon us," said I, after a moment, quite as much to distract her attention from my forgetfulness as because I had conceived any plan.

"I would rather do something, even if it hastens the coming of the climax," said she.

"Yes," I returned. "I would prefer to be killed fighting, as Mather was, or as the poor fellows in the passage got theirs, than to lie and take it like a worm."

That was not meant for her, especially. It was hardly an inspiriting speech for a young woman's ear. But she took the spirit of it like a man.

"Yes," she said. "Let's try to do something. I've been working ever since I sat down here trying to loosen my hands."

"That is as good a thing to try as anything."

OF COURSE I had already strained at my bonds. They seemed too thoroughly well fastened to offer any prospect of a hope. I tried them again, and more methodically now, at the suggestion she had made. They were tight and hard as if the cords were of wire.

"I haven't much hope of doing anything with these cords of mine. Can I help you, do you think? I can use my teeth, if necessary." I tried to say it lightly and to make the laugh I put into it the laugh of real fortitude. But as I looked up at the girl, I saw that she was not looking at me. Her face was red as if with effort, and I looked down at her hand toward which her gaze seemed to be directed steadily.

As I have said, she was next to the wall. Her right hand, on the arm of the rocking-chair, was next to an old steam radiator that I had not before noticed. Now, looking with awakened attention, I saw that she was working the arm of the chair against the radiator, and the cord with which her wrist was tied was being worn between the chair and the steel. She was rocking slowly up and down, up and down, and keeping the cord against the radiator by moving up with a motion of her feet each time the chair was forced away from effective pressure.

I laughed outright. "You are more than brave, dear lady," said I, my spirit leaping up at such an example. "I will help you."

I twisted my body across the floor, till I lay beside her chair. Then turning my shoulders so that I could press one of them against the outer rocker, I kept enough pressure against it to relieve the double effort she was making. It was a curious arrangement, and would have been laughable if it had not meant the one thing that lay open to us as a trial for life itself. And it worked, too. That is, it was slowly more effective than had been her single efforts. She gave a little exclamation almost immediately, to indicate that there was some evidence of progress.

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We had already been longer alone than I had expected. The daylight was growing apace, and I could see that it must be well into the morning—a sunny morning at that. Of course we had talked more than I have recorded here, but it was mostly speculation as to who and what the men who had us in captivity might be, and what their purposes were. They were fruitless speculations and led nowhere, so I do not repeat them.

I had thought many and vain thoughts, too, of the friends who would help me if they could—if they only knew of our situation. I thought of Canfield, and of his wonder at my non-appearance. How he would fume and swear at first over the fact that I did not bring in the story of the occurrences of the night. Of course he must have gotten the story long ere this. Probably it was in type and on the streets by now! I tried to imagine what sort of a story it was, and how it had been gathered.

I wondered how many of the facts they had, beyond the mere statement of the death of Dan Mather and description of the usual search for a body in the river. Had they found Mather's body? And if so, what had it told them of the manner in which that hapless officer had died? And did my name appear in the paper as among those who had disappeared in the night's grand festival of crime? What would be done about it? What was being done? And what chance was there that any one would learn all the truth in time to be of any assistance to us?

I did not talk of all these things to the girl. She had no pessimistic remarks to make of any sort, and I did not propose to be less bouyantly hopeful than she. In the intervals of our work, which presently grew strenuous enough for both of us, we spoke of what all this effort might avail us in case we succeeded in getting rid of our bonds before our guards came back.

And then, after we had worked away for all of half an hour, and the hard cord—she was bound with a linen engine-cord—was only half worn through, the thought that we might have been left here permanently, so far as our captors were concerned, came to us both. And it was a hopeful thought, indeed, compared with those we had been thinking.

I believe we worked the harder as soon as it had been breathlessly discussed, and as soon as it appeared to take on color because of the long delay in the return of the men. It sounds foolish, doesn't it? But a human being will grasp at the straws of possibility, certainly, when he is in desperate straits. We grasped at that idea. Perhaps it might not be a choice with the criminals as to whether or not they would come back after they had left us here. They may have had the best intentions in the world—meaning the worst, from our standpoint—and not have been able to carry them out.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE EDGE OF HOPE

MY LABORS put some new life into me. I am a fairly healthy young chap, and the abuse I had received was not of the sort that could thoroughly incapacitate me. My head was pretty sore, and the places where the cords crossed my bare wrists were lacerated and swollen, but with the coming of even faint hope that was real hope, I began to feel fit for enduring a great deal more than I had yet undergone.

I think the last strand of that tough cord on the wrist of Doris Kingslee was the hardest piece of cord in the world. Long before we finally got through it, it seemed to me that we should wear out the day before the final fiber would part. But it was not so, nor anything like it. I suppose we worked something over an hour on the joint task, and if you think that is a little thing to make so much fuss about, try it by our method. When I heard the hysterical, little, tired laugh from Doris Kingslee that announced our success, and when I saw the cords slip loose across her knees, I was fairly weak and too weary for the moment to join in the rejoicing. But when, with one hand loose, the girl bent over me and tried to do something with my bonds I was able to protest. Even when I felt the touch of her hand on mine, and thrilled oddly at it with a sense of companionship that was suddenly very sweet, I stopped her and made her return to work on her own bonds.

I need not describe the process further. There was more tedious work, but as the time passed and patience lasted and we were still left free to work for our own salvation, the deed was accomplished. It was her idea and her courage that accomplished

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it, for she had thought out the thing before I even arrived at the stage of thinking, and she had most to do with the execution of it. But the time came when she was free and managed to move stiff limbs and stand. And then she came to me and got my pocket-knife from my vest-pocket, where river-front thugs had evidently not thought to look for such an implement, and she freed me also, and I managed to get up and face her.

We leaned against the wall and smiled at each other like play-tired boy and girl. It was not at all as if there was tragedy in the very air about us, and the threat of we knew not what within another hour. We were free from our bonds. We had used our joint efforts to win that freedom, and the knowledge that we had accomplished something together and mutually had not a little to do with the satisfaction that small triumph gave me. That the larger problem of real escape loomed as great as ever, seemed for a minute not to matter.

When breath and ambition came back, the first thing I did was to go to and try both the doors in the room. There was another beside the one I had seen at first. But both were locked. Miss Kingslee told me that the one I had first seen was the one that the thieves had used. I call them thieves because that was what she had thought they were.

We had still no idea whether a guard might be outside, in some hall or stairway, and we used caution to keep our movements as quiet as possible. But we started no sentinel to attention, so far as we could judge. We seemed to be simply locked in and deserted, and hope climbed higher with that apparent betterment of our plight.

We went to the window, which was about chin height for me, and therefore rather above her eyes. I looked out and could see the tops of distant buildings. I climbed on a chair and saw the river far below. I could see only the wharves on the farther side of the stream, but I knew at once that we were some distance from the scene of last night's battle. We were out on the west side of the city, evidently having been conveyed there with great haste under cover of the darkness. The region was one of elevators and railroad yards, and there was noise in plenty below us that was audible when we managed to push up the sash a bit, and get it and the fresh air together.

But the window offered no better chance of escape than the doors. It was so far above the ground—probably at least eight stories—that we could not hope to attract attention. I was quickly convinced that it was better to wait till everything else was tried before we should make any effort to shout to people so far below. We could shout and be shot in the back by some sneaking guard, who could come in upon us and let me, at least, have my quietus without much risk of being heard by anybody else. I took it for granted that the building was vacant or that only the first floor was occupied, and that the enemy controlled the portion they had used as a prison.

OF COURSE we thought of dropping things out the window. That was an obvious plan. It took me very little time indeed to tear a sheet from my note-book and write an alarming message to whoever might find it. Then we tied it to the rung of a chair, which I found loose enough to twist out, with a shred of my handkerchief for a string and a streamer. We chuckled with our own notion of our cleverness. I dropped the thing out of the window, wondering at the ease with which it was accomplished; and climbing higher, I managed to get my head out, too, and to look straight down.

And there, not fifty feet below, I saw the projecting portion of an addition to the main building, with our message and its weighting stick lying ineffectively at rest a hundred feet at least above the tracks or the river I meant it to reach. And the handkerchief fluttered in the wind while I looked at it, as if with the very purpose of tantalizing me.

We prepared another message more carefully, and I chose another bit of the old chair for the purpose of weight. Then, with the thing in my hand, I stood up on the chair and leaned out once more, believing that by a little careful planning I could send the thing down to approximately the spot I desired to reach. I chose a section of open space between two tracks as the best and most conspicuous place, and I made another essay to use this supposedly easy method of communicating with the world.

And this time the message-bearing bit of stick fell wide of the projecting roof below. But it also fell wide of the spot I had in-

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tended it to hit, struck the edge of a narrow wharf far to the right and to windward, and bounded into the river. And once there, instead of floating easily out on the stream and giving itself and us at least a chance of discovery, it turned and made a direct line for the wharf itself and disappeared under the edge, apparently sucked back, away from the open river, by some current bearing between the piling.

Furious with the second failure, I turned about to look at the girl. As I did so, drawing my head in at the window for the purpose, I discovered her across the room at the door that was supposed to lead to a hallway, bent over in listening attitude.

I jumped down to the floor at once, as lightly as I could. Then I crossed and stood beside her. She put her finger on her lips as I approached, and then suddenly I saw her lose the color she had partially regained.

"Somebody is there!" she whispered to me softly.

"Where?" I asked, bending down beside her.

"Directly outside."

I listened. I could hear nothing and said so.

"Some one is sneaking about out there. He may be keeping quiet just now," she affirmed.

"Why should he sneak about?" I queried, as much of myself as of her.

"He may have been spying through the key-hole and have found us loose."

"Of course. Then they are not so forgetful. But why should they make any secret of the fact that they have found us out?"

"Why, indeed?"

I turned the knob of the door softly and put my knee against it. It did not give a particle. I had been impressed with the solidity of it before. I was impressed again now. It was not the solidity of any ordinary lock, that was sure. I felt certain that the door was barricaded on the outside. It had the feeling of a door that is nailed up.

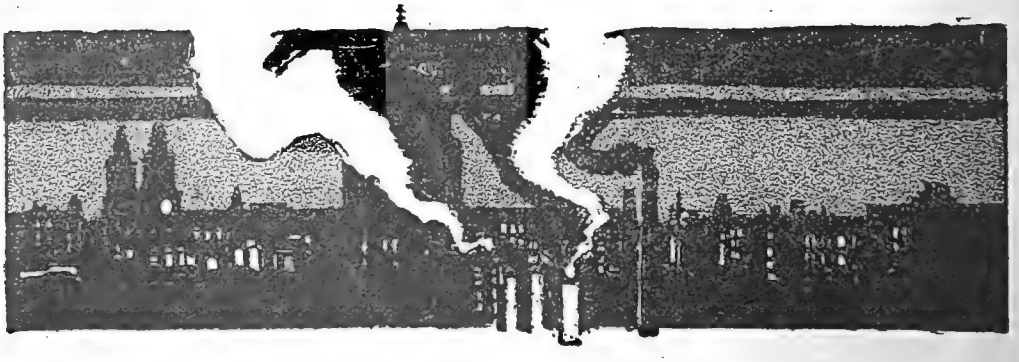
I turned back into the room. We had both been so deeply absorbed in the thing in hand that we had not looked around for a minute or two. As my eyes came up from the floor, where I had gazed in my listening, I stopped short and stared like a man who sees a vision. But it was no vision I saw. It was reality—cruel reality. For, in the middle of the floor behind us, standing with a grin on his evil visage that was in itself a menace, was a man, black-browed, oily of face and with the eyes of a rat, surveying us, while a magazine pistol was in readiness to do deadly work at our slightest hostile movement!

I stared into his dirty eyes, and slowly recovered, while Doris Kingsleee looked and understood without a sound. Then I spoke to him.

"Where'd you come from?" I asked, with all the hope that had been growing through that hard morning dying by bits in the withering light of his triumphant gaze.

He laughed soundlessly. "Me?" he asked. "Oh, I—I been here all the time!"

TO BE CONCLUDED



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The COWARDS

by TALBOT MUNDY*

IT WAS a plain white cotton handkerchief — sixpence halfpenny in Houndsditch or on any of the barrows that fringe High Street, Whitechapel; but it made a hole in an encircling army, prolonged a war, and cost maybe a million pounds. And "Corky" Wilmot had to bear the blame for it.

It was rough on Corky Wilmot—distinctly rough. He was newly out from home, with all his cut-and-dried and preconceived ideas waiting to be shattered by the facts of war, and although he was a first lieutenant in the First Glamorganshires, he was as new and green as the greenest milk-fed subaltern facing a half-company of militia for the first time on the Curragh.

Sickness, that had kept him from his regiment, and a Tory father who had fought in the Crimea, were the causes of his greenness; his father had preached to him of the old-time methods of controlling men, and his brother officers had had neither time nor opportunity to rub his new unpummeled nose into the rut of changed conditions; they had looked him over on his arrival at the front, and they had dubbed him Corky after ten minutes talk with him; but, simply because they could not help it, they had left him to teach himself.

So Corky Wilmot found himself detested and distrusted by his men, alone with twenty-five khaki-clad Glamorganshires on the extreme right flank of a slowly advancing British army. Corky was confident and not uncomfortable; but his men were the opposite.

His detachment, extended at uneven intervals, lay prone along the shoulder of a kopje, and between it and the neighboring brigade were more than three hundred yards of brown, dry veldt on which a snake could not have hidden; eight hundred yards or so in front of him, outlined against the sky like an antediluvian monster's backbone, was the kopje where the Boers were laagered; and because this was war, and in real war nothing happens as the text-books say it should, it happened that the untried Corky Wilmot and his twenty-five were the

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nearest of all the British army to the Boer position.

From the rear they were plainly visible to the men of a whole brigade, and yet they were acting independently, for they were cut off from support by the coverless tract of burnt grass. There should have been a veteran in Corky's place; but war is war.

No man knew how many Boers there were, or how few for that matter; only their bullets flickered and snicked among the stones, or sank with a *phutt—phitt—phutt* among the crevices, and each time that a man moved or showed himself a shower of them shattered the stone within two feet of him. There had been fifty men in Wilmot's half-company; but twenty-five were spread out on the veldt behind to await the stretcher-bearers, and of those twenty-five, ten were dead already.

There was another reason, though, why the remaining twenty-five kept still; the earth and rock where they lay were hot, but bearable; in front, though, and on either hand the stone lay naked to the shimmering glare, and he who shifted his position drew his hand back again with an oath and spat on it, for the sun-baked rock was like the lid of Hell and blistered what it touched.

THE men had marched forty miles that day to reach the kopje, and Wilmot had called them "slackers" and "old women," instead of taking an interest in blistered heels; he had sweated their enthusiasm dry and hurt their pride and nagged them into surliness, not from inherent idiocy—for Corky Wilmot lacked only teaching—but because he imagined that it was the proper thing to do. His were his father's theories passed down from the "good old days" when war was glorious and strong men were martinets; sympathy, so ran his creed, was good food for girls; iron discipline and the goad of sleepless, rigid exaction were right meat for the soldier man. So Corky's detachment suffered and swore and hated him.

Corky was staring at the enemy through his binoculars and wondering rather vaguely what ailed the brigadier; had he had his way he would have led those twenty-five of his straight across the intervening veldt to the Boer laager. He would have led them, understand—not pushed them. He had lost one half of his detachment without being hit himself, but that was mere coincidence, for he had spared himself nothing, and that was entirely as things ought to be; the trouble was that he had forgotten to spare his men.

For all but a mile between Wilmot's detachment and the mounted infantry away over on his right the Boers were completely surrounded, and yet another brigade of leg-weary, sweating, swearing, dusty, grumbling infantry was marching to close the gap.

Then, when the circle round the laagered Boers was quite completed, the circumference would shrink, brigade closing slowly on brigade and file on file, as an iron tire shrinks on a wheel and grips it; and the Boers, bowing to Providence and *force majeure*, would hoist a white flag and capitulate. The plan was a perfect one, a perfectly delightful thing on paper, and its execution was magnificent; it was only the inherent cussedness of Brother Boer, and one other thing, that prevented its succeeding.

The other thing was the large white handkerchief. The mounted infantry over on the right were the first to see it, and then the on-coming brigade, and then the brigade already in position on the left; the last to see it were the Boers, and they caught sight of it before Corky Wilmot did. Bugles blared out the "retire" immediately, and the advancing army slunk back again by companies, as a crowd shrinks away from a leper. Whatever the leg-weary men might wish, there were no officers in the firing-line who wished to be involved in a surrender.

The notes of the "retire" are unmistakable, and Wilmot turned his head to learn the reason of them; at that instant a Boer bullet shattered his binoculars, and a dozen others clipped the rocks around him, but it was something else that made his jaw drop, and it was certainly not fear depicted on his face, nor rage either; it was blank, impotent amazement. The extreme left-end man of his detachment was holding up his rifle, and a big white handkerchief was fluttering from the barrel of it.

He was speechless for at least ten seconds —seconds that throbbed while his senses battled with unbelief. He looked from his detachment to the different brigades, that were vanishing as a tide draws back, then back at his twenty-five again.

He and his men were marooned, outcast, abandoned to their fate, and the words of

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the company commanders who were retiring their men at the double stung him as fiercely as though he had actually heard them. He knew well enough what they were saying, for he knew what he would have said himself.

"Coward!" was the word that sunk into his subconscious hearing and brought the goose-flesh tingling out all over him. The Brigadier, he knew, would be much too busy cursing high heaven for the failure of his plan to waste words on a mere detachment, but the things that the Brigadier would not say afterward were worse almost than the openly expressed disgust of his brother officers; the Brigadier had eyes that looked straight through a man and a thin-lipped mouth that scarified without employing words.

THEN the gift of words came back to him, and along with speech came a fierce desire to place the blame where it rightfully belonged. The Boer fire had ceased in his direction, the enemy had accepted the surrender of the small detachment, and were concentrating now upon the rest; he stood up, and noticed that his men, too, had all sat up to ease themselves.

For a moment they all glared at him sullenly, watching the passion that flushed and waned and flushed again across his face; and then, because they felt half afraid of him, they rose and clustered in a bunch around the left-end man, who still held up the rifle with the handkerchief.

"You swine!" drawled Wilmot. "Oh, you unspeakable swine!" He had been brought up in a school where men are taught to modulate their voices under the stress of intense emotion, so his words fell as evenly and unaccentuated as though he had been praising them. "You call yourselves English soldiers? Bah! You scavengers! You weak-kneed, slimy, treacherous pariahs! You don't rise even to the height of being cowards . . . the name would be a compliment! You degenerate, jelly-minded protoplasm!"

"Now that's what I calls unkind!" said the company wit—he that was farthest away from Wilmot and seemed glad of it. "We saves 'is bloomin' life by takin' chances on the enemy's ignorance o' the articles o' war, an' 'e ups an' calls us protoplasm! Maybe that ain't an 'ard word?"

"Articles o' war ain't 'ard!" said he of the white flag, stretching himself, and yawning; "I studied 'em; they're clear as mud! Under the articles o' war we don't 'ave to take account of 'im no longer; we're at the disposal an' subject to the orders of the enemy until recaptured or exchanged. Meantime, there ain't no orders, an' my feet 'urts me 'orrid; I'm goin' to pull my boots off. 'Old this 'ere flag, some one."

He passed the upheld rifle to the man next to him, and proceeded to unwind his puttee.

"No discharge durin' the war, ain't there?" he continued. "Then 'ere's where I takes an 'oliday! My time was up twelve month ago, an' 'ere I am marchin' forty or fifty mile a day for one an' twopence, takin' my chance o' gettin' shot, an' fillin' up on bully beef an' buiscuit! War's war; but this 'ere war's a —— sight too much like a panorama o' sore feet an' empty bellies! Whew, ain't it 'ot!"

"Hold your tongue there!" ordered Wilmot, his fist clenched and his face white with fury.

He of the white flag drew off his boot, held it up, ceased talking for a second, and stared back brazenly.

"As I was sayin'," he continued, "I'm time-expired. This 'ere war'll be over in a month or two, an' meantime we'll 'ave a good time an' enjoy the 'ospitality o' Brother Boer! Under the articles o' war they 'ave to feed prisoners an' treat 'em decent, an' that's a —— sight more than we've been gettin' on the column!"

"Time-expired or not, I'll have you shot for this!" swore Wilmot.

"'Ow many 'ere's time-expired besides me?" asked the white-flag man.

"We all are!" Whoever it was that answered spoke the truth, for his commanding officer had handed over the oldest soldiers in the regiment to Wilmot in the hope that their experience would make up for his lack of it. "So we are, an' that's the Gawd's truth! We're all in on this. Don't you forget now, we obeyed 'is orders in 'oldin' up the white flag. We'll all take a rest till the war's over, an' then we gets our discharge an' our back pay, an' Mister Corky bloomin' Lieutenant Wilmot can go to 'ell an' eat spiders! Gawd! Won't the bloomin' Brigadier be sick, though!"

"Not 'alf! Can't you 'ear 'im cursin'? Them Boers 'll get away now sure! Wish they'd 'urry up, though, an' make us prison-

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ers; I want my dinner! Gee, I'm awful hungry!"

The mention of dinner seemed to strike a common chord in each man's system, and they settled down to talk of tender recollections of dinners they had eaten in days gone by, as hungry men are prone to. The Boers showed not the slightest disposition to get away, and for the time being they seemed to ignore their prisoners; the noise of heavy firing on the far side of the kopje showed that the other half of the British army was unaware as yet of what had happened; they were still pushing the attack, and the Boers were evidently much too busy repulsing it to waste time over men who were out of action.

SO CORKY WILMOT had plenty of time to think, and his thoughts were not exactly such as to make his brother officers envy him. He realized that, as things were, he would only do harm by trying to enforce discipline, so he sat down on a rock as nearly out of hearing of the men as he could manage, and waited with his head between his hands for what might happen.

The sun scorched the back of his neck, but he took no notice of it; he hoped even that it would give him sunstroke; he would infinitely rather die than live to face the disgrace that he felt sure in the bitterness of that moment he could never live down. Presently one of the men noticed that the sun was shining on his neck and walked over to him.

"Better tip your 'elmet back a bit, sir," he said almost respectfully, "the sun's right over'ead an' the back o' your neck's uncovered."

Wilmot ignored him, so the man leaned forward and tipped the helmet back himself.

"—— your impudence!" said Wilmot, rising suddenly, and glad of an excuse to boil over.

The man recoiled instinctively, but Wilmot's fist took him in the teeth before he could guard himself, and the man went headlong backward.

"I'll trouble you cowardly swine to keep your hands off me!" he snarled at them.

Then he sat down again, with his head once more between his hands and with the crime of striking an enlisted man added to the shame of a surrender.

He was Wilmot still, but the word "Corky" seemed less applicable, and the more he thought the more the corkiness went out of him. It was only natural that his thoughts should wander to the home he had left little more than three months ago, and that the thoughts should hurt him. He went through more agony in the next ten minutes than is needed to train the minds of most men in a lifetime; he little knew it, of course, but his brother officers could not have produced the same result in years.

He saw his old father reading the war news and watching for mention of his son's name in despatches; he remembered the speeches at the farewell dinner and the hand-shakes and the prophecies that he would come back from the war smothered in honor as previous generations of Wilmots had always done.

And he saw, with the clearness of vision and perspective of a man about to die, how exactly he had labored in the wrong direction; he realized how well his new-given nickname had suited him—what a foolish, ignorant, self-opinionated puppy he had been—and why his brother officers, and more especially his men, had held back their faith from him. Slowly, as he faced the situation on the kopje, the corkiness went out of him. And sand crept in. The Wilmots never lacked for courage.

He felt lonely still when he arose and looked around him, lonelier than ever; the army had fallen back until it was now two miles away or more, and the troops were maneuvering into fresh positions before resuming the advance; the men were evidently all tired out, judging by the slowness of their movements and the general slackness, which was visible even at that distance; he doubted very much whether a general attack would be resumed before next morning.

Instinct drew him over toward the men; training and tradition held him aloof from them; lacking experience, he tried to compromise, and regretted it instantly. But he was learning now; the youthful knowledge which passeth all understanding and is so intensely aggravating to other people had fallen from him and lessons had begun to take effect.

"Put your boots on, Smithson!" he ordered. "The enemy will be here directly to make us prisoners. You don't want to walk across there in your bare feet!"

Smithson squatted at ease on a rock,

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stared up at him and grinned impudently.

"'Eaps o' time!" he answered; "'ave a seat, old sport!"

He pointed to the rock beside him, and the other twenty-four men laughed.

Wilmot turned away. "Suit yourself!" he answered over his shoulder. "I meant to spare your feet, that's all."

"See!" said Smithson, holding up his right foot. "See them blisters? That's 'ow 'e spares your feet, —— him!"

There was a low growl of sympathy, and Wilmot realized how utterly the men were set against him; he would have to find some other means than mere civility to gain their regard; he would have to force it from them when the opportunity arose, and though he saw no present prospect of it, he set his teeth determinedly and made up his mind to wait.

IT CAME, as opportunity does always to determined men. Fate wastes no time with corky or pig-headed men who can not learn, but those that can see and understand she teaches in the sternest school there is. The Boers came—a detachment of fifty or sixty of them—some mounted and some on foot, all bearded, all shabbier than tramps, but each man standing or sitting on his horse like nothing less than a full-grown, hard-bitten, unfrightened man.

They were suspicious, as wild tigers are suspicious of a trap; half of them kept away at a little distance with their rifles cocked and ready, while the others came closer and relieved the men of arms and ammunition. Officers wore no swords in the later stages of the Boer war, for the things are useless weapons at a range of a thousand yards or more and the bright hilts make a good mark for riflemen.

Wilmot had a rifle like the rest, and he walked up to hand it to the commandant. A bearded, hawk-eyed ruffian stopped him before he had gone two yards and took it from him, and Wilmot bit his lip; the Boer noticed it and made some remark in Dutch to the others of his party, whereat they all grinned, and one of them burst out into a deep-throated *haw-haw-haw* that had a strange note of contempt in it. It was a stiff lesson, but Wilmot faced it and forced himself to return the grin.

"You understand Dutch?" asked the man who had robbed him of his rifle.

"No," said Wilmot.

"Then why you laugh?"

"I was laughing at your ugly mug!" said Wilmot, quite good-naturedly.

The fellow grinned back at him and pulled a face. "Got any cigarettes?" he asked.

Wilmot passed him his case, and the fellow pouched it, after handing him back one.

"Now, forward, to the laager!" he ordered gruffly; he seemed to think that Wilmot would take command of his men.

"I'm ready," said Wilmot, looking straight ahead of him.

"Bring 'em along, then!"

"What? Those? That's your business! They surrendered without my authority, and they're your prisoners; give 'em any orders you like!"

The Boer walked over to the commandant and spoke to him in Dutch hurriedly; the commandant grunted and loosed his *sjambok*.

"*Vorwaertz!* March!" he ordered grimly, showing the hippo-hide whip and making no secret of his intentions if disobeyed.

"'Alf a mo'!" said Smithson—he who had held the white flag up. "Wait 'alf a mo', will yer, while I get my boots on!"

A near-by Boer snatched both boots away from him and passed them to a mounted man, who hung them at his saddle-bow.

"*Vorwaertz!*" he ordered. And once more the *sjambok* swished.

Wilmot walked on ahead, holding a Boer's stirrup and smoking the solitary cigarette his captor had given back to him; Smithson, trained for the past twelve years to carry his complaints to officers, called after him.

"Hi, sir! They won't give me back my boots. 'Ow can I walk without 'em?"

"Ask them to lend you a horse," suggested Wilmot over his shoulder; "perhaps that's included in the articles of war you talked about!"

And this time the men laughed at Smithson.

"*Vorwaertz!*" said the commandant again, and the *sjambok* swished uncomfortably close to Smithson.

"All right," he said, "I'm coming!" and away he limped, holding on to the men on either side of him and swearing fiercely at the cruelty of the Boers and the injustice of the articles of war, as the hot rocks burned his feet and the sharp stones cut them.

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THE Boers led them to the laager and corralled them under a heavy guard between four wagons; they gave them little opportunity to see the laager, or to count the number of combatants, but beyond keeping them inside the wheeled enclosure they did nothing to them and nobody asked them questions. Wilmot sat with them, but as far away from them as he could get, and before long the commandant passed him a cigar, which he smoked contentedly. Three of the men pulled out their tobacco then, but the Boer guard promptly took it all away from them and went through the pockets of the rest.

"When do we get dinner?" asked Smithson plaintively.

"Better quote the articles of war to them," suggested Wilmot with a grin. "As you very wisely said just now, they're bound to feed you! All you've got to do is quote!"

And once again the laugh was with Lieutenant Wilmot and against the ringleader.

The sound of firing ceased and the distant British bugles told Wilmot that the columns had drawn off for the night; he knew that the men would be too weary for a night attack, but he guessed that there would be some rearrangement of the forces to prevent the Boers from making good their escape under cover of the darkness.

He spent some time in wondering exactly what rearrangements would be made, and then he began to look about him, peering from time to time between the wagon wheels and making mental notes of everything that he could see. Among other things he saw the rifles and bandoleers of his detachment lying where they had been thrown in a near-by wagon; he noted the markings of the wagon carefully, and then turned his attention to other matters.

When night fell the Boer commander came to him and asked him questions; he refused to answer most of them, but gave information about one or two quite unimportant details that seemed to interest the Boer; finally the Boer turned to the five and twenty hungry men and swished his *sjambok* and scowled at them.

"Undress!" he ordered.

Smithson gave tongue promptly. "Under the articles o' war——" he commenced.

"Silence!" said the Boer. "Undress or be thrashed! You have your choice!" Then he turned again to Wilmot. "You keep your things, of course, Lieutenant; but you'll understand my men must have spare clothes, and we have no other means of getting them. Also we can't keep prisoners. When these *rooinecks* have finished stripping they will be turned loose, and you may take them where you like; we're through with them when we've got their uniforms!"

"Can't they keep their boots?" asked Wilmot.

"Least of all their boots!"

"But——"

"My men need them. Your men are prisoners, and can be thankful for their lives!"

The men undressed shamefacedly, and stood helpless and uncomfortable before the rifles of the guard.

"Now get out of here!" ordered the commandant, "*Voetsack!* and don't let me catch you men again! We shoot the men that we catch a second time! *Voetsack,* d'you hear!"

The men filed out onto the veldt, a lonely looking, helpless mob, clustered all together, shamefaced and defenseless. The night wind chilled them and countless sharp things on the ground played havoc with their feet; they were hungry and tobaccoless and tired, and possessed of that bewildering sense of impotence that every grown man feels unless he has his boots on; but behind them, and a little to the right, walked Lieutenant Wilmot, with a rather confident swing in his gait and a smile flickering at the corners of his mouth and an altogether cheerful air about him that hardly seemed to fit the situation.

THEY marched for a while in silence, broken only by the muttered oaths and occasional groans of anguish as man after man stubbed his bare foot against some sharp obstruction of the night; then, when the last Boer outpost had died away behind them into the darkness and the occasional fitful glow of British camp-fires had begun to illuminate the skyline in front, one of the men—not Smithson—picked his way gingerly across to Wilmot and actually saluted him.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir——" the man commenced.

"Well?"

"Are we still prisoners, sir, or what?"

"At present, you're a mob, or roundel, or bunch of naked mutineers! To-night, when you reach camp, you'll all be prisoners

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again, and before to-morrow night you'll all be dead men—shot in the back as traitors!"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but it's not as bad as that, is it? We was cruel tired, an' cruel 'ungry, an' there was only private Smithson as gave you any cheek."

The men had halted, and stood shivering and shifting from foot to foot, pulling thorns out. Wilmot turned and stood still, facing them; there was no moon, but their naked bodies glistened in the night uncannily, and the white mist that was rising from the ground played like an aura round them; they looked more like ghosts than men—the ghosts of starvelings.

"Are you going into camp like this?" asked Wilmot, speaking slowly and distinctly. "If you do, I give you my word of honor that I'll charge every single man of you with mutiny, and I'll do my level best to have every one of you shot! The whole brigade saw what happened; there'll be no lying your way out of it!"

"What else, sir? 'Ow can we 'elp goin' in like this? They've took our uniforms, an' every stitch o' clothing; 'taint our fault we've got nothing on!"

"You forget my rifle," answered Wilmot; "they took that, too. I would rather have left my clothes behind."

"Well, sir?"

"Speaking personally, I'm going back."

The men shivered as an extra-cool gust of wind swept along the veldt toward them; Wilmot heard the wind and saw the men shiver and grinned.

"How going back, sir?"

"How? Walk, of course! Please yourselves, though! You refused to obey my orders, and I'm not going to give you any, unless—" he paused for about ten seconds —"unless some of you might choose to apologize and offer to try to wipe it out. In that case it would be different; you got me into this mess; I'd—I'd do my best to get us all out of it!"

"We're all sorry, sir! We're cruel sorry!"

There was a muttered chorus of "Sorry, sir! Very sorry, sir! Didn't realize what we was doin', sir!"

"Well?" said Wilmot, "I didn't hear you speak, Smithson."

"I didn't speak, sir."

"Speak now, then."

"I'm not sorry! Leastways, not that we surrendered! I take it we're speakin' as man to man, and not as private to an officer?"

"Correct!" said Wilmot. "Go ahead!"

"Well, sir, you treated us mean, you did! We're all time-expireds, we are, an' we're entitled to some consideration. You gave us none! We was clean, plumb fed up wi' you an' your ways, or we wouldn't 'ave surrendered. If you're sorry, sir, then so'm I; an' if you ain't sorry, then I ain't, an' you can line me up an' 'ave me shot afore I'll say otherwise!"

There was a murmur of approval. The men were cold and frightened, but they still had a fragment of spirit left, and Smithson had aroused it.

Wilmot paused for half a minute, standing with his hands behind him and letting the tenseness of the situation take full swing; then he answered like a man in clean-clipped words that had no hidden meaning in them: "I am sorry, Smithson, I'm —— sorry! I realize fully that my methods have been unfortunate and most unjust. I regret them very much indeed."

"Thank you, sir!" said Smithson. "I takes back all I said, an' I apologize most 'umbly! I'm senior man 'ere. Right 'alf-Company—Fall in! Tshun! Right dress! —Eyes—Front! Right 'and—salute!"

Five and twenty right hands licked up to five and twenty foreheads, stayed there for six silent seconds, and licked down again. Lieutenant Wilmot was once more in command. He had learned one lesson and applied it.

"We'll waste no time, then," he said promptly, judging it was wise to cut short the period of emotion. "While we were sitting in the laager I overheard the guard talking. The Boers believed that I don't understand Dutch—they got the information straight from me, so they had more or less of a right to it.

"I heard them say they would inspann and trek to-night; they'll try to break through a gap that their scouts have reported in our lines, and if we go straight back to the laager now we're likely to find it all bustle and confusion.

"That's the only chance we've got to slip in unobserved. We're not prisoners any longer; they've turned us loose to shift for ourselves, and we're combatants again. I know which wagon our rifles are in; I saw them thrown in together with the bandoleers; I saw that nobody removed them, and I made sure that I would be able to recognize the wagon again.

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"There's a box of dynamite in the same wagon, if ever I saw one; it's the usual size, and it's labeled dynamite. We must get our rifles and blow up the dynamite, and that'll make the Boers think they've been taken by surprise in a night attack; that'll get 'em on the run, and we'll have a chance to make good our escape.

"Anyhow, leave the rest to luck! No noise now, and march as carefully as you can. Never mind about keeping step, and don't hurry it; I'll go on in front; keep a close eye on me, and lie down and take cover the moment I give the signal."

SO THE naked procession started to tramp the weary distance back again. There was something resembling order, though, this time, and they felt less lonely and uncomfortable; there was hope in front of them, and they were leaving disgrace behind; the hope was a forlorn one, but it was better than the prospect of their reception in their own camp, and, moreover, they had with them an officer who seemed to have turned human, and Tommy Atkins will do wonders for an officer who shows that trait.

Somehow the hard ground hurt their feet less and the night wind chilled them less and the distance to the laager seemed strangely shorter than it had done when they were leaving it behind. They had reached the inner picket and were crawling into danger face-downward in less than twenty minutes from the start, and because it was Fate that was teaching Corky Wilmot, they managed to slip through unobserved.

There were palpitating seconds when they thought they were discovered—seconds when naked men crouched within a yard of an armed patrol and breathed into the earth in agonies of fear, and seconds when they flitted from bush to bush like specters, taking their chance of thorns and of being seen and of snakes and pitfalls, and there were the culminating, throbbing, agonizing seconds when they rushed all in line together across the last two dozen yards that lay between them and the wagon where their rifles lay. They reached it and packed in underneath it, and Wilmot threw a canvas sheet over the wheels in front of them; he, as the only one in uniform, stood less chance than the others of being detected in the darkness.

After that he searched inside the wagon and drew out all the uniforms that were bundled up together in a heap; he called the men out one by one and made them dress themselves, and as each man finished he sent him off into the darkness to hide close at hand until the rest were ready. One of the first was Smithson. He dressed and slipped silently across to some near-by bushes and—stumbled over a Boer who was sleeping at his post!

No one saw what followed. There was a scuffle and the beginning of a stifled scream and then silence, followed by subdued panting, as Smithson regained his breath. When Wilmot whistled softly to show that all were ready, Smithson crept up to him and held his hand out; there was something long and draggled hanging from it, and Wilmot bent down to view it closely.

"Gawd!" said Smithson, hissing into Wilmot's ear: "It was the bloke as took my boots! I pulled 'is bloomin' beard out by the roots an' throttled 'im! Guess we're not quits now, what?"

"Silence!" ordered Wilmot. "Now stand here in line, while I crawl in and pass out the rifles. Quietly now!" When the last man had his rifle and bandoleer, and the soft click of the last breech-block told that all were loaded once again and ready, Wilmot passed out the box of dynamite.

"Steady now, and don't drop it! Two of you over here on this side—that's it! Now, down gently—good! Now under the wagon with it. That'll do—take away that canvas sheet, that's right! Now—ready all! Retire! Double!"

They scooted for the darkness beyond the laager, but they had their boots on this time and their rifles clicked, so they made more noise than was expedient. There came the sound of footsteps and several voices challenged them.

"Halt, and lie down!" ordered Wilmot. "Now — volley firing!" he whispered. "Ready! At that box of dynamite . . . steady now, and take careful aim——"

THERE was a lamp that was burning near the wagon, and by the dim light of it they could barely see the outlines of the box; all twenty-five of them squinted down their rifle-barrels and listened to their own hearts throbbing as they waited for the word of command.

"Fire!" said Wilmot out aloud. A *c-r-a-ack* and a deafening, thundering, blind-

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ing flash followed the word, pieces of rock and wagon and camp equipment hurtled past them overhead, and the air-blast snatched their breath away.

"Independent firing! Commence!" ordered Wilmot. "Now, fast as you like, men, and make all the noise you can!"

Five and twenty men with a scheme that has perfectly succeeded can make a truly wondrous noise; but these were five and twenty mutineers wiping out the discredit of a mutiny—saved from the scorn of an army-corps—protoplasm turned into privates of the line—men who had all of a sudden found themselves and had got to know their officer; so the noise they made was out of all proportion to their number.

The Boers mistook it for the dreaded night attack; yells and the crack of whips as they hurriedly inspanned the oxen—hoarse orders given by men who had no right—fervid imprecation from the real commanders, and the crack of random rifle-shots filled the night with tumult. And volley after volley from Wilmot's men, and round after crackling, spitting round of independent firing added to it and kept it on the boil.

Then over in the distance came the blare of bugles, as the British army woke up to the knowledge that the Boers were treking and were in difficulties. No one knew from which direction the attack was coming, or whose brigade was yet engaged, only every one was anxious to be somewhere near the scrapping. Gallopers thundered down the lines for information and thundered back again without it, and confusion worse even than in the laager reigned supreme for fifty minutes.

The Boers trek like blown smoke in time of war, inspanning and streaking for the skyline almost as a herd of antelope get up and go; and veldt-bred and veldt-trained as most of the bitter-enders were they had an almost inhuman aptitude for slipping through between obstructions unobserved.

Now, under cover of the darkness they lit out for the eastward, creaking wagons and cracking whips and trampling horses and oaths and hoarse-bellowed orders, a hell-sent thunderstorm of noise. And ten British regiments mistook them for a mounted infantry brigade and gave them elbow-room.

When morning broke the extended, encircling, sleepy-eyed brigades advanced and found a deserted laager, with none save Corky Wilmot and his right half-company of First Glamorganshires in charge of it. The veldt away to the eastward was strewn with the litter of a retreating army, but the army they were looking for had vanished.

CORKY felt less shamefaced than he might conceivably have done as he marched to where his regiment was and met the Brigadier and halted his men and fronted them. The Brigadier looked at him with raised eyebrows and a mouth that sneered and was for riding past him; suddenly, though, he reined in and turned toward him.

"How is it that you have your arms?" he demanded.

"We recaptured them, sir."

"Tell me all about it!"

Corky told him, omitting nothing since his capture by the Boers, except the men's apology and his; he saw no need to mention that part of it. The Brigadier heard him out in silence.

"And who ordered the surrender yesterday?" he demanded, when Wilmot had finished speaking.

Wilmot's chin rose to the horizontal and the fingers of his left hand clenched, but there was no pause before he answered.

"I did, sir!"

The Brigadier stared hard at him. His eyes could read men's souls and keep their secret, and his mobile mouth could show what signs he chose; his gray eyes brightened now a little, but his mouth stayed firm and non-committal.

"That cost your country at least a million pounds, sir!" Wilmot stood rigid at attention, waiting for the word of doom.

"Join your regiment, sir!"

The release came like a thunder-clap, and Wilmot barely had presence of mind left him to salute and march his men off. But the Brigadier, who knew that he had lied, looked after him with a smile playing on his mouth and noted the strong swing from the hips and the free, well-poised hollow back of the man who had found himself.

The public, who paid the million for the prolongation of the war, never knew it, and the armchair critics would have denied it in any case; but the self-respect of six and twenty men comes cheap at a million pounds. The handkerchief was dear, though, even at sixpence halfpenny.

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SOUTH of PANAMA

BY LEDWARD RAWLINSON*

WITH a sudden start, Bullseye Clifton woke up. Every bone in his body ached and he was barely able to lift his tousled head. His face was swollen into a great beefy mass by the bites of insects; his stomach felt as if it had been fried to a crisp. The heat was terrific; the sun was burning and blazing as only a tropical sun can.

After ten minutes of painful effort he succeeded in opening his eyes, two narrow slits in his face through which he could just see.

He was in a boat, a long, narrow, native-made craft, floating downstream! And he was not alone. There was another man with him, a big, mahogany-tinted Bolivian, thick-set and heavily nourished, with a thatch of coal black hair and a straggly mustache of the same color; across his knees was a Martini rifle.

Clifton quickly closed his eyes again to rid himself of the nightmare, but the pain in his face and the burning in his stomach made him writhe in agony. Finally he gouged his eyes open again, then dropped one arm over the side of the boat and touched the water with his fingers. Yes, it was true; it was not a nightmare. He was on the river—the Madeira. He knew its warm, yellow waters and its jungle shores, the cabbage palms, the coconuts.

His legs ached; they were stiff and sore and he could not move them apart. Bracing himself with the sides of the boat, he gently raised his body to a sitting posture. He was shackled! His hand went back to his hip, but the deadly Automatic that had earned for him a name and reputation was gone. The big man smiled sardonically, and Clifton fell back like one in a daze.

Half an hour passed; he could stand the torment no longer. Again he sat up

"Give me water," he cried hoars[e]ly.

The Bolivian showed his white [t]eeth in a grin that had a shade of savagery "Help yourself, *señor*," he grunted conte[m]ptuously.

Clifton cursed aloud in English a[nd] Spanish till his choking and gurgling [re]ndered him inarticulate. His fists were [cl]enching and unclenching, his eyes burning [wi]th bitter light.

Silently the Bolivian rolled a [ci]garette and applied a match.

"Who are you, anyhow?" bello[wed] Clifton.

The native sat looking musingly [bu]t imperturbably at the American for a [mo]ment, then said: "I am a police officer, [se]ñor."

Clifton's face grew troubled. "Then where are we going?" he demande[d], shielding his eyes from the hot, brazen [gla]re of the muddy current.

"At present we are headed fo[r] the Atlantic Ocean," said the Bolivian [ca]lmly, "and only by the grace of God ar[e] we alive after tearing through half a doze[n] rapids.

*See page 631

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If we have the good fortune to be picked up before we get dashed to pieces, we are going back up the river and some day we'll land in La Paz."

Clifton sat back limp and helpless. "Why to La Paz?" he blurted out.

"Does the *señor* not remember the affair at the Banco National?" said the officer with a triumphant smile. "Then there was the Banco Agricola in Oruro, the Monte Blanco mine, and the Paymaster of the Bolivia Railway Company in Patacamaya. The *señor* must be *muy rico*. He has made much money—at the point of the *pistola*. One thousand pounds in English gold is the reward offered for *el señor*. Twelve thousand five hundred pesos! *Madre mio!*"

Clifton surveyed his captor with contemptuous deliberation. "One thousand pounds," he cried scornfully. "I can make that any morning before breakfast. Put me ashore and you shall have ten thousand. You will be a gentleman of the first rank with a house on the Alameda and another in the country."

"*Gracias, señor,*" replied the officer as he blew a straight, quick column of smoke into the air, "but I take no chances with the famous American highwayman who has robbed nearly every bank south of Panama. In any case, can't you see we're drifting at the mercy of the current?"

"Well, would you mind explaining how we got here?" inquired Bullseye. "My mind's somewhat blank."

THE Bolivian sat for a few moments silent and thinking hard. A furtive, sinister look crept into his eyes. "Yes, I will tell you," he said at length. "I've been trailing you for the past six months. Oruro to Puerto Pando, Puerto Pando to Riveralta, and Riveralta to Villa Bella. Last night you were in the café at Villa Bella. You were buying champagne for everybody, imitation champagne at fifteen dollars gold a bottle."

A light began to dawn on Clifton's mind. "I believe you're right," he said, nodding his head and licking his dry lips. "I have a faint recollection of watching a girl dance to the music of a flute. She was pretty, wasn't she, almost white?"

"Early this morning, when you were very drunk," continued the officer in a low, deliberate voice, "I dragged you with the aid of an Indian to the boat I had ready—this boat, and we started up the river towed by Colonel Goita's launch. As I was fastening the shackles on your feet you flashed out a knife and cut the tow rope."

"Oh, I did, did I?" muttered Bullseye fretfully as he leaned over the side and spilled a hatful of yellow water down his burning throat.

"Yes, you did," snarled the Bolivian.

The boat raced down the river with a violence that was terrifying. Suddenly there came a low, distant rumble as of thunder.

"What's that?" yelled Clifton.

"The cataract of Girao," shrieked the native through lips that had gone white. "The largest of them all!" His big fingers nervously clutched at the stock of the gun and his eyes were wide and staring.

Nearer and nearer came the noise. The roar of the torrent was in their ears, the musty smell of the water in their nostrils.

"We'll be there in a minute," shouted Clifton, rising painfully from his seat.

"Sit down," thundered the officer. "You'll upset the boat."

Clifton glowered sullenly but refused to move.

In an instant the Bolivian was on his feet. The boat rocked and dipped till it was half full of water. "Sit down," he bellowed in a voice of authority.

"Unlock these shackles," retorted Clifton. "We'll be dashed to pieces."

The big man raised his gun. "Sit down," he repeated harshly.

With an angry oath, the prisoner obeyed. "There's the cataract now," he shouted with a bitter laugh. "You won't get that thousand after all."

Less than a hundred yards away the cataract of Girao was boiling and hissing through a deep cañon and flinging its glittering spray high in the air. Drawn by the mighty force of the mad waters, the boat shot along with dazzling speed.

The officer sank down, shaking fearfully, his face ashen, his eyes glued on the American.

A few seconds later he jumped to his feet again. "Look at that," he yelled, pointing to where a giant tree whipped the river with its trailing branches. "There's a chance we'll swing near enough to save ourselves. Jump when I say 'Go.' It's our only chance." He clipped his words off short and his eyes grew somber.

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Clifton made a gesture of assent. "It'll be a hell of a jump," he said briskly. "Unlock these shackles quick or you'll lose that thousand."

With unusual celerity for a man of his race, the Bolivian took out a heavy key from his pocket and unfastened the lock that bound the prisoner's ankles to a great chain and ball. "Now, go!" he roared.

Grim and determined, they sprang like wildcats into the branches. It was a fearful struggle, but in fifteen minutes the pair stood on the bank, their clothing torn to shreds, their bodies bruised and scratched.

The big man, overcome by excitement, sank down in the long grass of the jungle. Clifton sat a few feet away tending his scars. Not a word was spoken for half an hour.

FINALLY Bullseye broke the silence. "Where's your gun?" he asked sharply.

The elusive, sinister look crept back into the Bolivian's face and he looked about him in despair. Big drops of sweat showed like beads upon his forehead, the corners of his mouth twitched.

In spite of his bodily torment, Clifton laughed long and incontinently.

"I guess we'll postpone that trip to La Paz, now," he commented dryly. "Besides, I don't like the mountains, I always get *soroche*. I'm going down to the coast for a while where the nights are soft and balmy and where they make boys into paying-tellers and paymasters.

The officer quickly recovered his composure and coolly lighted another cigarette. "We start up the river at sundown," he said quietly. "The man is not born of a woman who can escape from Juan Manzano."

"You never caught a gringo before," was the quick retort.

Through the stifling afternoon, in an atmosphere poisoned by the smell of decaying vegetation, they sat glaring at each other on the river bank. Swarms of mosquitoes hovered over them, and black ants whose sting was like the prick of a red-hot needle crawled up their legs and down their backs. At times Clifton stood up and fought the insects with his hands, snapping, growling and cursing.

Finally, after an awful day's work, the sun went to rest; it was soon dark. The stars bobbed out and leaped and danced like red sparks in the hot heavens. Then the moon rose full and clear, transforming the river bank into a dainty fairyland where everything was unearthly and unreal. The noise in the jungle was indescribable. Above the everlasting roar of the cataract came the chirping of a million insects, the screeching of birds, the chattering of monkeys, and the occasional roar of a prowling tiger.

Thoroughly exhausted after many nights of watchfulness, the officer's head sank slowly down on to his breast. He made an effort to reassert himself, to fight off the coming unconsciousness, but without avail. His eyes were heavy and blind with sleep.

With the inborn caution of his profession, Bullseye rose silently to his feet and crept slowly down the river. Once a pair of wild, savage eyes peered at him through a network of trailing vines, and more than once the terrifying growl of some hungry animal sent a chill to his heart, but all night long he tore his way madly through the thick ant-covered underbrush.

II

DAWN came and with it the sun, a lurid red ball in the eastern sky, commencing anew its daily attempt to burn up the uncharted land.

Sick and miserable, the fugitive threw himself down on the ground. Soon he became conscious of danger and trembled violently. There was something moving behind him; he wheeled slowly. It was a jaguar! The great beast had captured a turtle, had turned the reptile over on its back, and having torn away the small soft part of the under shell was ripping out the meat with his paw. Paralyzed with fright, Clifton clutched at his empty stomach, his heart pounding and smashing till the blood thumped audibly in his ears. Hot flushes and cold chills raced through him. He attempted to rise, but the use had gone out of his limbs.

The jaguar halted his meal and sniffed at the air in which he had detected something unusual, then, seeing Clifton, uttered an angry snarl and came slowly forward, his great green eyes fierce and eager, his hungry jaws dripping blood.

Just at that moment there was a peculiar whistling in the air, and as the jaguar was

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about to spring he fell back, roaring faintly and rolling and writhing. Whereupon a human laugh rang out, followed by an exclamation in Spanish.

It was Juan Manzano, the police officer. "*Buenos dias, señor,*" he said with strained politeness. "Another second and that animal would have chewed up a thousand pounds' worth of American meat. This is a dangerous country to travel in alone, *señor,* a dangerous country. We need each other's company."

Bullseye smiled feebly, but his lips refused to utter the words on them. He perceived that the officer had a long bamboo tube in his hand and a bundle of white-tipped arrows slung over his shoulder. "I don't know whether I'm glad to see you or not," he said at length. "Where did you get the blow-gun?"

"Ah, *señor,* I got that *gravitana* from my old friend the chief of the Acanga Pirangas," replied the Bolivian, showing his white, malicious teeth again. "I passed him early this morning. He and his tribe were on their way back from San Pedro where they had been to sell *caucho*—rubber. He gave me the best he had, for I once saved his favorite daughter from a band of Parentintins. The arrows are all poisoned, *señor.* Look at the jaguar, he died instantly, yet I did not inflict a mortal wound. It was a mere scratch."

His voice was low and vibrated with fierceness. His eyes glowed like diamonds. He came a step nearer, a little pallor under the yellow of his skin. "It's one thousand pounds dead or alive, *señor,*" he said in a menacing tone.

"I know it is," responded Clifton, waving a protesting hand, "but if you take me back alive you'll be a hero. They'll make you Intendente of La Paz or Corregidor of Sicasica. You'll be fixed for life. In the meantime, however, I'm hungry. Let's eat."

"You'll find turtle eggs over there," said the officer pointing to a sandbar. "Eat your fill."

Clifton scrambled to his feet and started for the river bank.

The officer wiped the perspiration from his face and neck, then stood with folded arms eying his prisoner closely. "Make the slightest attempt to escape," he warned, "and I'll put a poisoned arrow in your back."

In a few moments Bullseye returned, his hands full of great eggs. "These are strictly fresh," he said half petulantly; "have one."

"*Gracias, señor,*" answered the native with a sickly smile, "I have already dined."

Seated on the ground, Bullseye broke one of the eggs, and after allowing the oily part of the inside to rise to the top, skimmed it off with a stick and ate it slowly. "I can't say I'm stuck on turtle butter," he declared finally. "I never was, but a man's got to eat something. I'd like a long glass of Oporto now to wash the taste away."

"The wine is good in La Paz, *señor,*" said the officer with an ominous hardness in his voice, "and the señoritas have dark, flashing eyes. Their beauty is the fame of Bolivia."

Clifton bared his shoulder and exhibited the livid mark of a knife. "I take my wine without women now," he explained. "It's safer."

"We go to La Paz, nevertheless," said the Bolivian, rising, "and we start now." There was unpleasant emphasis on the last word.

But Clifton made no answer. The relaxation of overstrained nerves had set in. His eyes closed heavily. A second later he opened them again and looked dazedly at the frowning native.

"Get up," demanded the officer imperatively. "You can't sleep now."

The prisoner put his hand to his head and rubbed his aching eyes. "All right," he muttered, "I'm coming now. How many days is it to La Paz did you say?"

During this speech, he staggered to his feet and reeled unsteadily from side to side. Then with a crash he toppled over in a heap.

"Get up," repeated the officer harshly.

There was no response.

III

WHEN Bullseye woke, it was just light enough to see through the dense foliage. At first, he was unable to reconcile himself with his surroundings, but the instant he discovered that his feet were securely tied with leathery vines his bewilderment faded away. With a mighty effort he sat up and endeavored to loosen his bonds. It was no use; his fingers

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were stiff and sore, bitten by insects and lacerated by thorns.

Half an hour passed. The officer stirred restlessly in his sleep.

Bullseye came swiftly back from a blissful reverie in which he had been eating lobster salad and drinking gallons of imported Oporto in the Americano at Para, and looked at the swarthy native. He was lying on his side, his stubby fingers grasping the blow-gun. The arrows were still slung over his back.

Quietly and carefully, Clifton put out his hand and withdrew one of the arrows. It was a foot long, wrapped at one end with a wad of fine white silk to fit the bore of the gun, and tipped at the other with a delicate point. He knew that the arrows of the *gravitana* were steeped in poison, a deadly poison that made a man helpless from paralysis in thirty seconds and stiffened him in death in thirty more. For a few moments he twirled the weapon between his fingers, thinking hard. Just one prick in the arm or the leg and the Bolivian would cease to trouble him. He would be in the land of everlasting *siestas*, where the hammocks are always slung on the cool verandas and where yellow fever and black vomit are unknown.

The arrow dropped to the ground. A sickly smile flickered over Clifton's face. "No, sir, I'll be hanged if I do it," he exclaimed, shaking his head as if to rid himself of the thought. "If I can't beat a greaser in a straight game, I deserve to be shot."

At this point the officer woke with a start.

"I'm still here, old man," said Bullseye with an uncertain laugh. "Did you think I'd started for La Paz?"

"Ah, *señor*, *buenos dias*," answered the Bolivian almost good-naturedly. "We must go now."

"Then release my feet," directed Clifton. "Where I come from they rope steers, not men."

"*Con mucho gusto*," was the immediate answer.

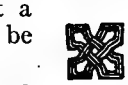
As the native bent over and cut the vines, his eyes fell upon the arrow. Clifton quickly grabbed it in his hand and came to his feet.

The Bolivian's face blazed with fury. He took one step backward and then leaped forward, a veritable whirlwind of murderous rage. Bullseye went down with a crash, but quick as lightning he was on his feet again and met his big opponent squarely, landing him a smashing blow full on the jaw that rattled every tooth in his head. Next they clinched, and a second later fell to the ground, where they rolled in the thorny underbrush, gouging and tearing at each other's flesh in a venomous passion. For ten minutes this hideous, unequal struggle in the heart of the primeval forest continued, then, breathless and helpless, they wrenched themselves apart and lay side by side, their jaws drooping, their faces soaked with blood and sweat.

Bullseye was the first to recover his senses. By a severe exertion of will he sat up and took an inventory of the scars of battle. His lips were cut and bleeding, one of his teeth was missing, and there was a painful swelling in his neck.

The officer was lying on his back now, breathing heavily. His face was fearful to behold.

Clifton paused for a moment, looked dazedly about him, and pulled himself to his feet. Worn with fighting, sick with hunger, and shaken with fever, he plunged recklessly down the river through a dark tangle of orchid-covered trees and parasitic vines. Flies blinded him, ants and mosquitoes bit unceasingly. The hot, steamy breath of the forest scorched the very blood in his veins.



LATE in the afternoon he discovered a deserted *tambo* full of lizards and creeping insects and there halted for the night. As he lay on the bare floor moaning with pain, there came a rustling and crackling of branches in the jungle. His hand went instinctively back to his hip, but there was nothing there. In an instant he was on his feet, trembling like a man with the ague. "If that's another jaguar, I'm done for," he whispered hoarsely.

An agonizing wait of perhaps a minute and the leaves in front of the *tambo* parted.

It was the Bolivian, a defiant grin on his battered face! "The man is not born of a woman who can escape from Juan Manzano," he muttered vindictively as he laid his blow-gun on the ground and entered the hut.

Slowly they both sat down, looking each other in the eyes. A silence that was stifling filled the room. The Bolivian glared from

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under his dark brows so covertly and meaningly that Clifton saw visions of trouble.

Finally the big man spoke: "Did you say you were going to Para, *señor?*" he asked smoothly.

Clifton placed his hand to his side as if pressing back a violent pain. "*Si, señor,*" he replied through gritted teeth, "San Antonio, Manaos, Para—that is my itinerary."

"And mine also," declared the Bolivian positively. "From now on we are *compañeros de viaje*—traveling companions.

"I shall be delighted to have your company," answered Clifton, looking squarely at the black eyes, hot with hidden purpose, "I know little of the Madeira trails."

Again they relapsed into a moody silence.

Just before darkness set in the Bolivian rose and walked to the jungle. At the base of a giant fig-tree he inserted an arrow in the blow-gun, held the long tube to his mouth, and blew. Immediately a ring-tailed monkey toppled over from the topmost branches and fell to the ground, the agony of death written on its tiny features.

"What are you going to do with that?" asked Bullseye feebly.

"Eat it," answered the native with a snarl.

Quietly the Bolivian made a fire in front of the *tambo* and roasted the simian. Then, hacking away a leg with his knife, he fell upon it like a hungry tiger.

Clifton sat a few feet away scanning his lacerated fingers.

"You better eat, gringo," said the native in sharp tones. "Might as well get used to it now as later. That poison doesn't injure the meat—it just paralyzes the nerves. The Acanga Pirangas kill all their meat with the *gravitana.*"

But Clifton went supperless to sleep.

At daybreak they left the *tambo*, and for six days wandered over the rubber-paths of the gloomy forest, often so weak that they actually crawled on hands and knees. Their food consisted of parrots and monkeys, mostly monkeys.

The early mornings were soft and cool, but when the sun came out it was like the opening of a furnace door. The heat was terrific; not a leaf stirred in a thousand miles. The atmosphere was saturated with moisture and surcharged with the odor of decaying vegetation and stagnant water.

Weird and uncanny were the nights. Save for an occasional firefly or a solitary moonbeam that penetrated the dense foliage, the jungle was dark as the tomb, and the darkness was filled with the chattering of monkeys, the roaring of tigers, and other nerve-racking sounds.

Once they were treed by peccaries, and on another occasion Clifton stepped on an enormous green snake. Death was everywhere. It stalked them noiselessly in the daytime, it hovered over them unceasingly in their broken sleep. Here Nature reigned supreme, a despotic monarch whose unseen hand was ever raised to strike down the intruders into her boundless domain.

On the seventh day Clifton was a wreck. A sudden paroxysm shook him, and like a stricken bullock he fell to the ground, his face ghastly white, his lips twitching with suppressed pain.

The native came slowly up and stooped over. "What's the matter, gringo?" he asked feebly.

Clifton turned his head. "I'm all in," he muttered hoarsely through swollen lips. "But you're all right. It's a thousand pounds dead or alive." Then his eyes closed and his head fell back.

IV

FOR two weeks, he lay in a rudely constructed *tambo* battling with a high fever and a never-ending army of merciless red ants. The Bolivian utilized every scrap of knowledge he possessed in an earnest effort to alleviate his sufferings, but in the heart of the equatorial jungle he was almost helpless. The only food procurable was nauseating to a sick man's stomach, and drinking water from pools of slimy mud only fed the fever's flame. Though the river was close at hand, a trip to its bank would have left the sufferer exposed to the mercy of the wild beasts that constantly prowled about them and the boa constrictors that coiled in the trees. At night, jaguars and tigers came from all directions, their eyes gleaming through the darkness like polished emeralds.

The moment the fever abated, Bullseye insisted on continuing his journey. As if pursued by some imaginary enemy, he plunged desperately forward.

"You better go easy," warned the officer.

Clifton made no response. His head swam with dizziness and his knees wavered,

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but he flung himself along the overgrown rubber-path with fiendish determination. His face was paler now than it had ever been before, and big beads of sweat rolled down his hollow cheeks.

Of a sudden the pathway widened and the lonely hut of a rubber-picker came into view, a rough affair of bamboo poles and palm leaves set in a cluster of fern trees and dainty plants.

Clifton uttered a cry of relief and lurched through the open door. Seated by a charcoal fire was a palsied old Indian, cooking. His face was lean and wrinkled and in his nose were two yellow feathers. From his ears hung tusks of the wild boar.

With a toothless smile he welcomed the strangers and gave them mats of straw to sit upon. The officer addressed the old man in Aymara, Quichua and Spanish, but none of these tongues could he understand. Therefore, by signs and by motions, they showed him they were hungry. From the pot over the little charcoal fire, the Indian fished out a great juicy steak of tapir and laid it on a leaf in front of his guests. This, together with a pile of small black beans, they ate voraciously, washing down their food with enormous quantities of sweetened water.

For two days and nights they reveled in the hospitality of the toothless old Indian, after which time they bade him an affectionate farewell and started down the river once again. At the edge of a swamp Bullseye came to a halt and seated himself on a fallen tree. The officer squatted awkwardly down close by.

"You've got the bulldog tenacity of an Englishman," said Clifton grimly. "If there's a bank in Manaos, I'll hold up the cashier and buy you off."

"That is impossible, *señor*," said the Bolivian with a graceful bow, "absolutely impossible."

Clifton's face lighted up with an amused smile, but he remained silent.

Half an hour later they started through the swamp. Suddenly the officer rent the still air with a fearful yell and crumpled down in the mud and slime. "A swamp snake!" he screamed, baring his leg to the calf. "Gringo, quick!" Quick as a flash Clifton ripped out the Bolivian's knife from its sheath and cut savagely at the flesh round the tell-tale marks of the deadly fangs. Then, taking one of the cartridges from the man's pocket, he slit it open, poured the powder into the wound, and applied a match.

But it was too late. In a few moments the victim fell unconscious, and the stupor held him till he died.

FOUR months later a ragged, hollow-eyed American appeared in broad daylight at the office of the Treasurer of Bolivia at La Paz, and at the point of a gun demanded all the gold in sight. The terrified official handed over the money and the robber escaped, despite the hue and cry that rang immediately through the narrow streets and out to the wide *pampa* beyond.

That same night when the widow of Juan Manzano returned from mass she found a heavy bundle outside her *patio* door. It contained one thousand pounds.

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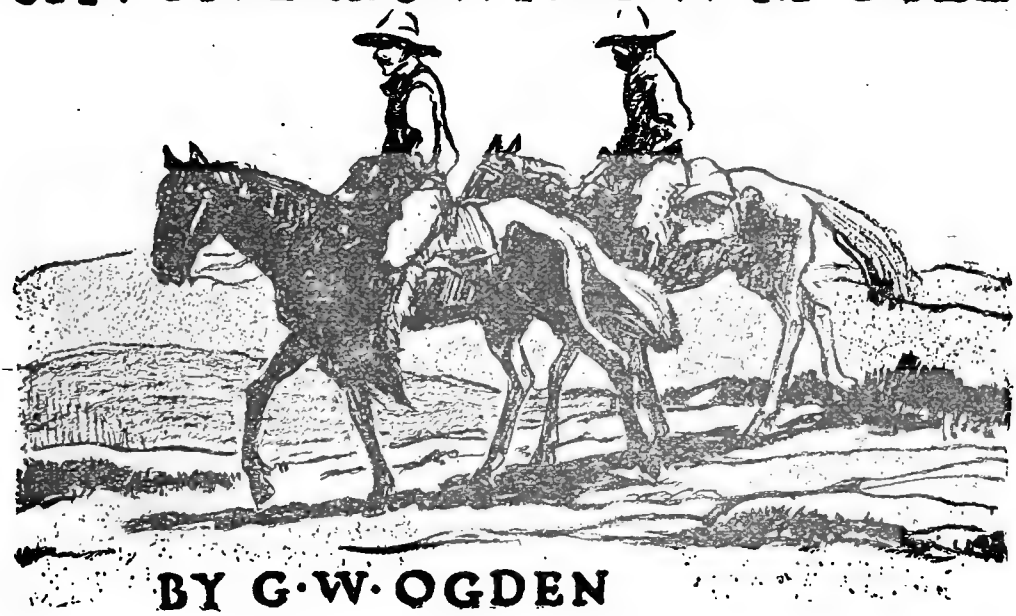
SAVING the WIDOW McDILL



BY G·W·OGDEN

IN THE Sweetwater in those days they built dance-houses instead of churches. Every forty or fifty miles the traveler came upon one of them, sitting as self-contained, with its door barred against vandals, in the naked lap of the grinning desert as any church to be found in the most filtered atmosphere of worldly consequence and tainted wherewithal.

The dance-house of Four Corners was an example of all the rest, long and wide and windowless, made of hewn logs carpenterly joined, as must be done when it is desired to build a long wall out of the trunks of short trees. It stood on the bank of a disorderly little stream, a dust-brown hill behind it, a hill as characterless and bare as the roll of a shepherd's blanket.

People had come from afar to that first dance of the season, some of them spending days on the journey with the women's finery tucked away in trunks. For the convenience of the rugged beauties who had suffered so much jolting over uneven highways for one night of pleasure, a tent-cloth had been stretched across one corner of the hall, whither the trunks were dragged and toilets made.

Many an old roarer from the hills had come down, togged in holiday garb which only hit the high places, and they, requiring time to thaw and mellow and become plastic under the sun of human association, stood around the door with the backward youths, watching the Widow McDill through the figures of the dance. For the Widow McDill was one of the institutions of Four Corners.

It was a pleasure to see her dance, an inspiration to watch her promenade. Like a spirited horse that is lashed, and leashed by a stiff rein, she bounced up and down in the shafts, bumping now impetuously into the couple in front, swerving the next moment like a broncho around a clump of brush clear of the circling dancers, swinging lean Goss Birney over against the wall with a dash of shrill laughter, clear and unmodulated, like the neigh of a mare.

The Widow and Goss Birney were the champion dancers of the Sweetwater country, as much an institution of public interest and pride as the hall itself. The wonder of all dwellers in the leagues-wide neighborhood was why such talent did not consolidate and breed a fleet and sturdy herd. The nucleus of all human speculation on the Sweetwater was breeding, the dearest desire a good breed and a strong one. Life

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there was a contention against unpeopled wastes, so there was nothing indelicate in the thought.

Admiration, amazement, envy, flickered in the faces of the dancers and onlookers as the vigorous couple clattered through the changes of the rustic quadrille, making more of it, getting more out of it, than the inventor himself ever dreamed, perhaps, could be done. You should have seen the jigging when they broke the embrace of hands in the "grand-right-and-left" and faced each other in the "bal-an-ce y' all." The Widow, chin up, eyes laughing, lips apart, grasped her skirts and flung her nimble feet in the old-country steps known to none other on the wastes of Wyoming, where dainty tricks of toes and heels were so fully appreciated.

As for Goss Birney, he pivoted and wheeled, whirled and skirmished and beat the time out in complicated steps in a purely original fashion that made the widow fairly rush into his arms, like an appreciative gust, when the caller yelled "Swing 'em around an' around an' around, an' *swing* 'em around agin!"

What a pity, indeed, that such talent was not merged in a partnership that would plant a line of nimble-toed Birneys on the county. Well, 'most everybody knew the reason why. It was the old question of the mule between hay and oats, unable to make up his mind until he died of starvation. Goss Birney could dance; Dan Lantry could sing. Both wanted her.

The Widow McDill was in the cattle business because John McDill, dead and gone these four lonesome years, had been in the cattle business and left it on her hands, and it was a business that she had come to know from range to market. Her ranch was back in the hills and her house was a low one of peeled cottonwood logs, her roof topped by an elk's head with wide antlers, a spring of water near the door. Her mother, broad-backed, sandy-haired and Scottish of feature, lived with her, wearing boots, and riding like a man.

The Widow was running five hundred head of cattle, more or less, with the assistance of Curly Winch, her cowboy-extraordinary, and whatever transients happened along from time to time. Her grazing ground was a part of the public domain represented in a valley some ten miles long and half as wide, which was only a little gash in that big country where a man can get his breath, wedged in between the foothills and watered on the edges.

Being a subirrigated valley, the grass was rich there, and many a cowman on the march had turned covetous eyes upon it, but a warning and an explanation from one of the Widow's outriders always served to keep the traveling herds away. For the Widow McDill was known and respected from the Sweetwater to the Big Horn Valley, as John McDill before her had been.

TWO days after the dance, Goss Birney appeared at the Widow's ranch with tidings of a Mormon drover crossing the range with a big band of sheep.

"Must be ten or fifteen thousand of the little nibblers," said he, "and if they ever git into your valley it'll be Katy-bar-the-door for your grazin' for the rest of the season. I knowed that Curly was off the range and I thought if you wanted me to I'd kind o' picket the mouth of the valley to warn 'em out."

Consternation sucked the color from the Widow's cheeks.

"I'm ruined if them sheep gits in here and befouls my range," said she, placing her hand confidingly upon his arm, "and if you'll warn 'em out, you generous, kind man, I'll hold you dear in my heart till my dyin' day."

Goss struggled with his blushes under the combined seduction of word and touch, mounted his horse without more words and rode away to guard the Widow's pasture-lands. A little while later Dan Lantry dropped his bridle rein before the Widow's door. He brought the same news, proffered the same service, and was accepted with the same benediction. The Widow McDill watched him away with a queer little smile.

In the course of the day, Dan met Goss as they rode across the neck of the Widow's vale. They passed a dour look, nodded, and rode on. A few hours later they met again, with the sheep hovering like a cloud on the flat three or four miles away. Grinning quizzically, each reined up.

"Well, what'd she say to *you?*" questioned Dan.

"Huh! reckon you can guess," answered Goss. "What'd she promise you?"

"Huh! reckon you can guess," said Dan.

Side by side they rode on, silently. Per-

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haps a mile was passed without a word between them. After a while Dan jerked his head toward the omnivorous band.

"You know what you and me air, podner?" asked he. "Well, you and me, we're a pack of durn fools. Here we air, neglectin' our own business to keep a band of maraudin' sheep off of a piece of ground that's as much the property of that Mormon flockmaster as it is hern. If you and me, or you *or* me—we can't both be figgered in—had any interust in it, now or a-comin', it'd be a sensibler layout. But what will that widder do when it's checked off and done? Will she come up to the lick-log, huh? Looks to me like this was a good time to fetch her up to the troft, fodder 'r no fodder. What a you say, podner?"

Goss eyed him open-mouthed, as if the inspiration had choked him for a moment. Then he chuckled:

"Feller, I guess you're about right. Them sheep ain't scented this valley yit, but them Mormons has; I seen one of 'em a-spyin' around from the top of a butte on the west side a little while ago."

"Well?"

It took another quarter-mile of churning lope to gather Goss's fragmental ideas. When he had the thing plain enough to feel, he slowed down to a walk.

"Tell you what: le's me and you do, feller. One of us has got to git out of the game, comes to a show-down, anyhow, and she's kep' both of us a-hangin' on about long enough. Them sheep won't head for this valley before to-morrow mornin', so le's me and you rack out to the Widder's place and lay this thing before her in plain words."

Goss slewed himself in his saddle, his thigh across the seat, using both hands to hammer and clinch his argument.

"Le's me and you go to the Widder and say to her in plain words, 'Now look a-here, old gal, if you want us fellers to keep on a doin' for you, well, you got to stand up to the brandin'-iron, that's all. Either one of us is willin' to work his durn head off for you as a husband, but it's gittin' durn monotonous as a plain old friend. If you didn't need no husband, then it'd be all right. But you do. We know it. Ever'body else does. All right, then. You want them sheep and all sheep that may come traipsin' around here in the future kep' out of this here valley, and Curley Winch he's off on a drunk and ain't here to do it, and couldn't do it if he was here, 'cause he ain't got sand enough to head off a jack-rabbit. All right, you cut out this foolin' and git down to bed-rock. You step out and put your hand on the man you want for a husband, and the other'n he'll drop out of the game. The other'n 'll stick to you two when help's needed, till the last dog's hung.' That's what you and me we'll say. Is it a go?"

Dan brightened.

"That sounds good to me," said he. So, without more words they rode back to the Widow McDill's house and laid the matter before her.

TEARS sprang into her eyes as she stood between them, a hand upon the shoulder of each, and they, determined but tame under her subduing touch, turned their eyes uneasily upon the ground.

"Oh, boys," she cried, "what's got into the two of you to come to me like this? Can't you see that you're tearin' the heart out of me, can't you see it, you two big lubberly men? Don't you know, after all the times that I've told you, that it's because I can't tell in my own heart which one of you I like the best, that I haven't made choice long ago? I can't do it offhand like this, I can't do it, not even if the Mormon sheep gnaws my grass into the ground and ruins me, clean ruins me forevermore!"

They had no word to say to help her, although she longingly searched their faces for it.

"Give me two days, a day to each of you lads," she pleaded. "I promise you I'll give my answer and make a choice at the end of two days. I'll do it. If the sheep ain't gone by then, and you can't leave to come up here, I'll go down there and tell you what I've made up my mind to do. I know I need a man, I've needed a man ever since poor John left me. This ain't no place for a lone woman, and I'll make up my mind like I've promised you I will."

"All right, two days goes, and we'll go back to keep the sheep out of the valley."

Goss was the spokesman, and as he spoke they swung into their saddles and rode back to place the barrier of their strength between the Mormon sheep and the widow's grass.

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IN THE evening the Mormon flockmaster came for a conference with Goss and Dan. He was a swart man of middle-age, mild spoken, tall. They told him that the valley, while free range in law, was in fact the Widow McDill's private pasture.

"John McDill," explained Dan, "was one of the first cowmen on the Sweetwater. He went to Scotland for his wife, and he got a daisy, too, I'm here to tell you——"

"And that ain't no lie," gravely seconded Goss.

"And then he up and died after a couple of years, leavin' her alone to handle that bunch of cattle. They ain't a cowman in fifty mile on each side of here that wouldn't come here like a streak o' red leather to hold this valley agin' settlers or sheepmen or anybody else, for the widder of old John McDill."

"Grazin's been awful bad the last five days," said the Mormon, looking hungrily at the green grass in the swales. "My sheep could fill here a day or two and not harm the widow's pasture. It might save me several hundred head; I'm drivin' to New Mexico, you see."

"Can't help it if you're drivin' to hallelooyer," snapped Goss, "you can't come in. It ought to be enough for you fellers to come acrost the country, pizenin' the range, without wantin' to hog it on a widder woman. You keep your sheep clear of this valley, old feller. If they ever git in here you'll see a dozen cowmen here inside of two hours, shootin' 'em as fast as they can work their fingers."

The Mormon did not answer, but stood sweeping the valley with his famished eyes, as his fathers gazed on the promised land from the desert's rim when hope was all but dead.

"Does the Widow McDill live in this section?" he asked.

"Yes, west side of the valley, ten mile south."

The Mormon flockmaster thanked them and headed his horse for the sheep camp. Evening was thickening. Off across the gray plain, in front of the northern range, hung a purple curtain, softening the tumbled mountains. Where the sun sank the clouds burned red, and to the south, where pine trees topping the range ripped the mists, swept a rain-storm, its lightnings and its torrents of descending water plain to the eye, its thunders silenced in the leagues that fell between.

The cowmen pawed together some charred chunks and fanned the coals into flame. Dawn with its promise, evening with its tragedy, were alike to them. They sat unmoved through the spectacular changes on nature's stage. They had grown up in its tremendousness and could not feel it.

"That feller's bull-headed," said Goss; "he's jist about up to drivin' them sheep in here to-night and runnin' chances. If that happens, podner, somebody's goin' to git hurt. It may be that Mormon flockmaster, it may be a few of his herders or a few hundred of his sheep, or it may be me or you."

"Reckon you're right," admitted Dan, without a flicker of interest or emotion, his eyes on his broiling bacon.

II

MORNING discovered the sheep even farther away from the Widow's grazing lands than on the day before. Noon revealed the Mormon's apparent intention of taking up the march for the railroad again. The vanguard of the flocks was moving away toward the southwest.

"Changed his mind," said Dan. "No use of me and you hangin' around here no longer."

"Looks that way," admitted Goss, "but that may be a dodge to git us off watch and run 'em in. Better hang around till mornin'."

"To-morrow's the day she's got to pick and choose," reflected Dan, as if communing with himself.

"Wonder who she'll settle on?" said Goss.

"Not wishin' you no bad luck, podner, but I reckon I could name him," Dan replied.

"Huh!" snorted Goss.

"Huh!" echoed Dan.

Sunrise spread the flats before them without a sheep in sight. The cowmen surveyed the empty leagues from an eminence, turned their horses' heads up the valley and set off in a coyote lope.

"Me and you we've been a-hankerin' around after the Widder a good while, ain't we?" grinned Dan.

"A right smart while," assented Goss.

"And we've always been open and above-

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board with all our dealin's, ain't we?"

"Open and aboveboard."

"Whatever hard feelin's they's ever been between me and you, we've always showed man to man, and not went around talkin' behind backs, ain't we, podner?"

"You're right, podner, me and you we've always sparked the Widder on the square."

Dan turned a sorrowful countenance toward him.

"Old feller, I feel mighty sorry for you," he said.

"May change your tune before the day's over."

Several miles of silence. From a rise the Widow's ranch-houses and corrals were in sight.

"You'll take it like a man, won't you, podner? You won't hold no hard feelin's agin' me, will you?"

Dan grinned.

"I want you to come and dance at my weddin', Goss, jist the same as if nothin' never had happened," he cordially returned.

Before they had time to alight at the corral bars, the Widow was out to meet them, glowing like a coal before the bellows.

"Jump right down, boys, and come in to breakfast," she called.

They were very much obliged, but they'd had breakfast. The sheep were gone, the danger to her pasture was past. That was what they had come to tell her, and—they lounged in their saddles and refused to meet her eyes.

"Yes, I was goin' to ride down and hunt you boys up this morning." She seemed to ponder over this plain statement, flipping the loose end of a splinter on a rail of the corral. She looked up at them, quickly. "I knew the sheep were gone," she said.

"*You* knowed it? How did you know it?" demanded Dan.

"I knew it last night," said she. "Oh, I've got something to tell you, boys."

"We reckoned you'd forgot it," Goss ventured.

"I promised to tell you to-day which one of you I'd marry, didn't I, boys?"

"You shore did."

Tears came into the Widow's eyes as easily as the smiles came to her lips or the blushes frolicked on her cheeks. They trembled there as she gazed at the two dusty, smoke-brown men before her.

"The woman never lived that had better neighbors than me, and I'll remember you two boys to my dyin' day, just like I told you I would."

THIS simple renewal of her pledge of constancy appeared to affect the Widow deeply. She rested her forehead on the top rail of the corral and cried. The cowmen, knowing the Widow's moods, were not moved by compassion to dismount and soothe her. They sat stolidly by, chewing tobacco and waiting for the squall to pass. When the Widow raised her head again she was laughing.

"You're the changeablest critter I ever seen," said Goss.

The Widow cackled hysterically.

"Ain't I?" said she. Then more tears. "That's what I wanted to tell you, that's what I *got* to tell you. I promised that I'd tell you to-day which one of you I'd marry. Oh, boys, boys, I can't marry neither one of you, I can't, I can't!"

They sat up in their saddles, somewhat interested.

"Well, why can't you, that's what we want to know?" severely questioned Dan. "What's the reason you can't? Why?"

The Widow was fingering the splinter of the rail again, flipping it, flipping it, hiding her face like a bashful girl.

"Because," said she.

"'Cause why?"

"Because I've promised to marry somebody else. We're goin' to be married Saturday."

The intelligence stiffened the backs of the cowmen. They lowered upon her, reining their spurred and dancing horses nearer the fence.

"You mean to tell us you've throwed us over?" challenged Goss. "You mean to tell us fellers that?"

"Who's the feller?" demanded Dan, a choky huskiness in his roaring voice. "Pint out the feller to us, will you?"

The Widow turned toward her door. "Mr. Miller," she called, "Mr. Miller-r-r!"

The Mormon flockmaster, calm, unmoved, his long face just as serious as it was two days before, his thin legs laced tightly in his boots, his broad hat tilted over his eyes, came forth at the summons, the mother of the widow filling the door behind him!

"Mr. Miller, he's the man," smiled the Widow, measuring his thin form affectionately; "his ranch is seventy miles north."

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"That feller!" gasped Dan, "you can't marry him; that feller's a *sheepman!*"

"My father was a sheepman in the old country," defended the Widow.

"And he's a Mormon," added Dan.

"He's a Christian Mormon!" fired the widow; "they ain't all alike."

"And he's a stranger to you," solemnly accused Goss; "you don't know him from Adam's speckled hen."

"He's not a stranger. I know lots of people he knows."

The Mormon flockmaster, beginning to see some humor in the situation, had managed to wrinkle up a grin.

"Well, podner," said Dan, leaning over and offering his hand to the sheepman, "you won out, and I admire your nerve."

"We're goin' to give a dance at Four Corners Saturday night," she announced; "you boys'll come, won't you?"

They did not reply. Swinging their horses short, as if they turned on pegs, they galloped away. They rode a long time in silence. Dan spoke, finally:

"You know what we air, podner, me and you? We're a pack o' durn fools!"

Goss didn't trouble to make answer, and Dan didn't appear to expect any, the case being so plainly incontrovertible. Miles of silence, then Goss said:

"Comes of knowin' his business, podner. Here me and you we've been taggin' after the Widder three year and more and neither one of us wasn't never able to git our brand on to her. Along comes this Mormon feller she ain't never seen before and does in two days what me and you couldn't do in nearly twict as many years. Me and you we're greenhorns, and a greenhorn don't know how to make good. A greenhorn he don't know nothin' about the amazin' ways of women and widders. That feller he's had experience. Like as not he's sparked a dozen women and married 'em in his time, and me and you we ain't never sparked *one* and done it right. Shucks, makes me sick!"

THEY came at last to the fork in the dim trail marking the parting of their ways. Both drew rein. Dan reached out his hand.

"I reckon you're right," said he.

They spent their feeling in their parting grip, riding then each his own way, each nursing his own queer thoughts.

It was a mighty hard matter for Goss Birney to give the Widow up under those circumstances. If Dan had been the lucky man he could have set his jaw and managed to wrestle it down, somehow, but he felt that a double sacrilege upon the traditions of the country would be consummated if the Widow McDill married a skulker who was both a sheepman and a Mormon.

"Sheepman!" mused Goss, bitterly, "throwed me down for a sheepman! Lordy, when one of them fellers gits soaked good with wool-grease in shearin' time you can smell him a mile!"

"Sheepman, sheepman, an onery, long-faced, foot-going sheepman!" Turning that brand of an outcast occupation in his thoughts as he rode, Goss came across an idea. It hit him so suddenly and so hard that he reined in short, sitting there a little while with his mouth wide open. Presently he was doubling back on his way, and in due process he took the trail leading to Dan Lantry's ranch.

Dan had been thinking hard about it, too, but he hadn't hatched any idea. So he welcomed Goss's proposal with beaming face. It was not such a highly original plan, for that country, after all was said: merely that they mount fresh horses, pursue the Mormon's sheep, fall upon the herd and kill as many as they could, scattering the herders and allowing them to escape, so they might carry the news of the assault on his flock to the owner.

"If I don't miss my guess," said Goss, "we'll find them sheep somewheres in the Widder McDill's paster."

"I was jist a-goin' to say," agreed Dan.

And that was a shrewd guess. They found the whole band well up the valley, devouring a country that never had been polluted by the foot of a sheep before. The two losers to the Mormon flockmaster in the uncertain gamble of a woman's affections waited until night to fall on the sheep, so the herders, who might take courage from their small number, would not offer resistance, but when they began operations they made as much havoc in the flock as a plague.

As the herders who carried the news to the flockmaster had to go on foot, it was morning before he reached the valley where his scattered herd was scurrying in a panic. Dan and Goss saw him galloping around the stampeded sheep, trying to quiet them

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and gather them up, as they sat in their saddles upon a hill two miles or more away. Well enough pleased over the outcome of their strategic move, they rode away toward the Widow McDill's.

III

IT WAS Saturday, the Widow's wedding-day, and those two determined men were agreed that it should be her wedding-day, even though the intended bridegroom doubtless had forgotten all about her by that time in figuring up his loss on the sheep. But the old question that stood between them before the sheepman came was there just as unanswerable as in the past. Which should have her, and how should they settle it? Marry one of them that day the Widow must, for they were determined to save her and the honor of the country, but who was to be the lucky man, how determine the matter between themselves, now that the Widow's choice was eliminated?

"No, I'll not gamble for the Widder," declined Dan, answering the proposal of Goss that they toss a coin, play a game of seven-up or draw their names from a hat, "I think too much of the Widder to work her off like a horse. But I tell you," said he, after mature deliberation, "what I will do. I'll agree to it that the man she mention's first by name when we see her takes her. Is that a go?"

"No leadin' on, no trappin' goes?" asked Goss.

"No leadin' on and no trappin'."

"Then I'll take you on it," agreed Goss, and they shook hands over it, which was about the only seal any contract had in that country in those times.

The Widow came out as brisk as a bottle of pop in answer to their shout from the gate.

"Oh, it's you boys," she said, perhaps a shade of disappointment in her eyes. "Where are you two goin' so early in the mornin'?"

"Us?" said Dan. "'Y, we come over to go to your weddin'. Where's the old man?"

The Widow looked troubled, peering off toward the valley under the rim of her hand.

"Somebody shot up the sheep-camp last night," said she, "and he went down there early this mornin'. I expect him back 'most any minute now. Come in the house. Won't you boys come in and have some breakfast, or have you had breakfast?"

Well, no, they admitted that they'd left a little too early for breakfast, and they wouldn't mind a bite. The Widow made many an unnecessary trip to the kitchen door, which opened on the view of the valley, while getting the meal ready, and many a queer look passed between that pair of cowmen as they waited. Who was to be the lucky man?

"I reckon," remarked Goss, slashing his steak with deft wrist movement, acquired by long practise, for it takes long practise to cut a Wyoming ranch steak and keep it on the plate at the same time, "I reckon you'll be happy with Mr. Miller. He seems to be a mild and peaceful kind of a feller."

"Has he got much of a fam'ly?" politely inquired Dan.

The Widow blushed.

"Oh, you boys, you stop foolin'!" laughed she.

Wasn't she ever going to name anybody, was she going to keep dodging all day? The strain was becoming tremendous, and time was passing, also. The Mormon flockmaster might, by some streak of perversity for which sheepmen are notorious, come back at any time and upset all calculations.

"I hope," said Goss casually, "that none of his wives is younger than you. It's turrible to be a second runner in a Mormon fam'ly, I'm told."

"Goss Birney," flashed the Widow, "what do you mean by insultin' Mr. Miller that way!"

Both men rose, solemnly, almost grimly, leaving their half-finished meal.

"I mean, ma'am," answered Goss, "that we're goin' to drive over to the Agency, me and you, and I want you to git into your things as quick as you can."

"Agency? Drive—Agency—me and you? What——"

The Widow stared at him, certainly at a loss for once in her voluble life for an answer.

"Sure," said Goss, "Agency, drive."

"What for, what for?" she stammered.

"Git married," said he.

"That's right," said Dan, reaching for his hat, "come on, feller, I'll help you hitch up the team. We'll have to use one of your teams, ma'am," he explained, turning soberly to the Widow McDill.

In the face of such masterly proceedings, what could one poor little widow do?

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That's what the Widow McDill asked herself as she put on her finery and helped her mother, who was going along, to hook herself up the back.

Dan gave them the benediction of a friendly handshake as they sat in the democrat wagon ready to start for the Agency.

"I'll round 'em up for the dance to-night while you're gone," he promised. "You drive by Four Corners as you come back and everything'll be ready."

IN SPITE of his long hours in the saddle the day and the night before and his unusual experience of getting married, Goss was as limber as a roasted hickory switch at the dance-house that night. Himself and bride were giving one of the finest demonstrations of the elevating art of jigging ever witnessed in Wyoming when the Mormon sheepman made his appearance at the door.

Dan met him, masking his emotions, if he had any to disguise, under a grin.

"Well, me and you we lost out on the Widder, didn't we, Mr. Miller?" he greeted.

Mr. Miller was not to be turned from his grim purpose by any show of friendliness or sympathy. He lifted his long-carrying voice in denunciation, so loud and earnestly as to bring the jig to an abrupt end and break the noise of the fiddles as suddenly as if he had cut their strings.

"I come here to tell you two maraudin' scoundrels that I know you two done it, and that you two'll pay me for every sheep you killed!" he announced, while the dancers, who knew nothing of the tragedy of the sheep or the diplomatic maneuver which had beaten the Mormon out of a bride, gathered around trying to sound a meaning of the sudden disturbance. The bride, carried back to a recollection of her broken pledge by the roar of the sheepman's voice, cowered and trembled at her husband's side.

"You two done it," he accused, "and I've got the proof on you! You'll pay me for them sixty-three sheep you murdered or I'll have the law after you, if they is any law in this cussed country!"

Dan was rummaging among the weapons discarded in one corner by the gentlemen before they set in to dance. A six-shooter is such an unhandy implement to take to the floor, for if a man capers extraordinarily it most generally pops out of the holster and gets under foot. As for Goss, he looked the sheepman over quizzically.

"Was you a-speakin' to me, Mr. Miller?" he asked, in a very good imitation of polite surprise.

"Speakin' to you and that other murderin' thief that went with you last night and killed my sheep!" said the flockmaster. "And I serve notice on you to come and settle with me to-morrow, or I'll git the law a-holt of you."

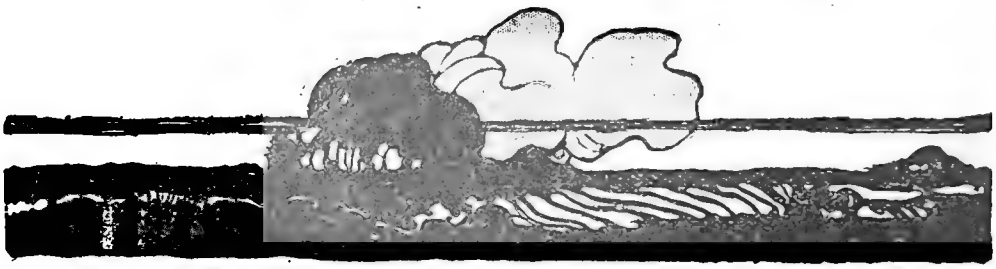
"Only law we know much about right around here is this kind," said Dan, edging through the crowd, pistol in hand. "If you're ready, me and you we might as well try that case right now."

"I mean the law of peace," said the sheepman, looking with much aversion and disgust at the bare weapon, "and I don't riot and brawl with firearms."

"Then I reckon your chance for a settlement is kind of slim," Dan remarked, "and you might as well be goin'."

The sheepman backed out of the door, and the caller summoned the dancers to a quadrille. But the little bride, sobered by what she had seen and heard, had no heart to take part in it just then. She drew Goss outside, where Dan stood watching the sheepman mount his horse.

"He didn't even mention *me*," she said, a bit hurt and bitter. "Did you ever see a man as unpolite as him? Why, I might 'a' been married to that coward by now if you hadn't saved me, and I'll be grateful to you two boys to my dyin' day!"



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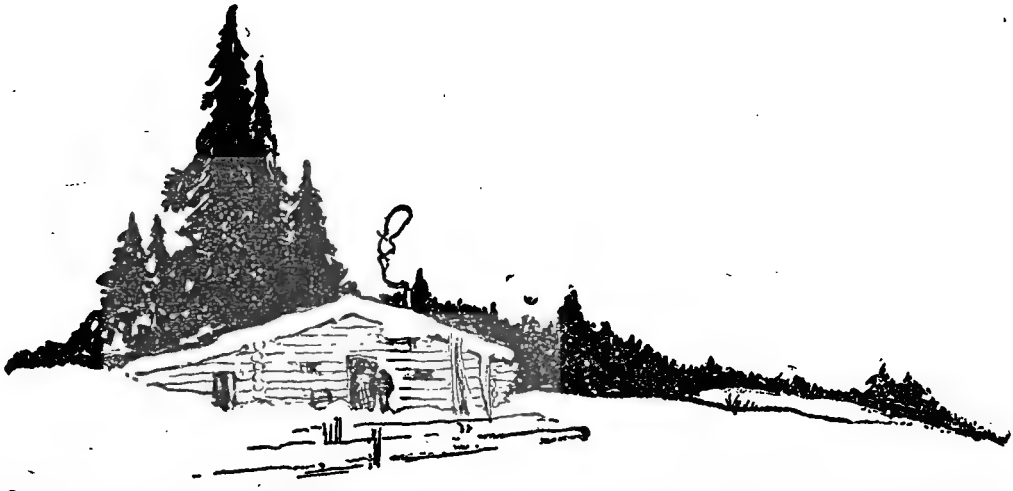

THE DROP of BLOOD

BY CHARLES WESLEY SANDERS

WHEN the pipe of the big-bellied stove had got red almost to the ceiling John Hammersley rose, closed the draft and shut the front door. The heat radiated through the room so that John and his guest had to shove back their chairs. The guest had been caught in the first big snow-storm of the year and he had been forced to ask John for shelter. They had had their suppers and had come out into the general store which John conducted. The tobacco in two of John's big meerschaums was burning free now. The wind pounded futilely at the shutters and the door, driving a powder of snow through what cracks it could find.

"Do you have storms like this often so early in the season?" the traveler asked.

"So early?" John Hammersley repeated. "It's near December, man." He pulled at his pipe and exhaled long, full streams of blue smoke. "Why, twenty years ago it would have been the dead of Winter by now."

"Yes; the seasons change," the traveler assented.

He leaned back in his chair and looked at his host. John Hammersley, he should judge, was nearly fifty, but the years seemed to have touched him lightly. There were only a few gray steaks in his thick, reddish hair, and the lines in his face were the lines that outdoors and not the years bring. He was still as lithe as a boy, the traveler had seen; and the hand that held his pipe was as steady as a rock.

A man in short, heavy coat and thick leggings came in out of the storm to buy tobacco. He was covered with snow from head to foot.

"Come by the fire," John said, as he got up to get the tobacco.

"Naw," the man said cheerily. "I don't want her to melt on me. It ain't so cold. How be ye, John? And how's the wife? Much obliged. So long."

He went out into the whirling storm again, and John came back to his seat. The traveler bit his lip. So the woman was his wife; the traveler was glad he had not asked the question that had been on his tongue.

"You've always lived up here?" he asked.

"I came here twenty years ago."

A reminiscent look came into John Hammersley's eyes. He opened the stove door and stared at the leaping flames for a moment.

"I saw you looking at my wife at supper-time," he said slowly. "You were wondering, weren't you? Yes, she has some Indian blood in her—just a drop. But she's the finest woman God ever created. Two months ago we had been married twenty years. And there's never been a minute that I regretted it. I'm no squaw-man, either."

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The wind tore viciously at the door in the moment's silence that ensued. The traveler shrugged down into his chair.

"Where you from?" John Hammersley asked.

"Montreal."

"Montrequeal we kids used to say. I was born in Hamilton."

He replenished the fire, refilled his pipe and began to talk in a low, even tone as if he were seizing a chance that did not come to him often, shut away from the world as he was in this northern Michigan village.

"I SHOULD think the seasons do change," he said, reverting to the traveler's comment of a moment before. "Twenty years ago, when I came here, the children were climbing the rail fences on the frozen snow. I came from Hamilton to Sarnia, and even down that far I walked across the St. Clair River on the ice. There was horse-racing on Black River, too. Those were Winters!

"I married my girl after I'd been here one Summer. She took an awful chance. The doctors said I had consumption. They didn't know as much about it as they do now, but they thought fresh air would do me good. I was always tall, but I never bulked up the way I do now till I had been up here for about a year. The change in me physically was astounding. I was made over. I was transformed from a sickly clerk to a woodsman who could tackle any man of his weight. She did it."

His eyes roved over the store and came at last to the far wall.

"See those snow-shoes hanging there?" he asked. "We took our honeymoon on those. Her father was a white man like me. He had married a girl with a little more Indian blood in her than my wife has. The old man had come up here in his youth about the way I had, but from a different reason. The reason doesn't matter now, but he came in haste. He opened this store and began to make a little money. Once he was gone for a week. When he came back he had his wife with him. The people talked for a while till they got used to her. Then she became an inconspicuous figure in the community. She worked for the old man for fifteen years. Then she died, leaving her daughter to take her place.

"In spite of the fact that he had married a woman with more Indian blood in her than his daughter had, he was suspicious of every white man that came near the place. When I began to hang around I wasn't very cordially welcomed, except by the girl. We'd met on the street, and one look had done the business for us. Of course, I had to get a strangle-hold on my white man's pride before I could bring myself to ask her to marry me." He refilled his pipe slowly. "——!" he exclaimed in a disgust that had apparently lasted through the years. "She was a better woman every way than I was a man. I'm ashamed every time I think of my feelings.

"About the time I was talking it over with myself and trying to convince myself that I'd not be a fool if I married her, the old man jumped on me with both feet, so to speak. It was a night a little like this. I came in and bought some tobacco and stood in front of the stove—just here. The old man—he was over fifty by now, a big, gray-whiskered, gray-haired fellow with a voice like a fog-horn—leaned on the counter, glowering at me. I guess he'd spent himself pretty fast in the first years of his youth, for his face was seamed and his hands knotted like an elm branch.

"'Where's Patricia?' I asked.

"He had picked the name up somewhere and had given it to the girl, to get as far away from the Indian in her as possible, I suppose.

"He came out from behind the counter and walked close to me. His eyes were hot and his big right hand was clenched.

"'What do you want her for?' he demanded. 'What're you hangin' around here for, anyway? You're a white man; you don't want to marry an Indian girl?'

"'She isn't an Indian girl,' I said. 'She's got your blood in her.'

"That took him aback for an instant.

"'Well, she's got her mother's blood, too,' he said.

"'She's good enough for me,' I declared.

"That drove him into a fury.

"'Good enough?' he screamed. 'I should think she is! She's too good. She's too good for any man in these parts. None of you'll get her. Not you, anyway—and not Red Pete.'

"I caught at that last. What had Red Pete got to do with it? He was an out-and-out Indian; his blood was undiluted. Did he think—I couldn't frame the thought even to myself. It was too hideous.

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"'What about Red Pete?' I whispered.

"He laughed, showing his white teeth, like a wolf's.

"'That's all you amount to,' he said. 'You can't see what's going on. You leave all that to the old man. He's got to be on guard all the time against Red Pete and you and all the young devils in this village. I'll strangle some of them yet!'

"He dropped into a chair here before the fire, and his hands worked as if he had Pete's red throat between them and was slowly forcing the Indian's life out at his repulsive lips.

"I repeated my question.

"'What about Red Pete?' the old man said. 'Why, he's like you—he *says* he wants to marry my daughter.'

"'What did you tell him?'

"The old man got up.

"'Just what I'll tell you,' he said, shoving his old face close to mine. 'You can't have her! None of you can have her while I live! None of you is good enough for her, even if she has got Indian blood in her. Now, you get out! You're a white man, and I won't threaten you; but if you see Red Pete you just tell him I'll choke him to death if he sets foot inside my store! Tell him from me!'

"I staggered home through the storm as if I had been drinking Tommy Moriarity's ten-cent whiskies all night. When I got home my hands shook so I could scarcely lock the door. But I got it locked and I kept it locked all night. I didn't sleep much. Every time the wind'd shake the house I'd 'most jump out of bed. I was *afraid!*"

He mended the fire again. The traveler watched him in astonishment; it didn't seem possible that fear had ever had him for bedfellow.

"IT'S an awful sensation to be afraid like that," John Hammersley went on. "It wasn't apprehension, mind you. It was fear—the kind of fear that gets into your vitals and paralyzes you. Why, man, do you know what I contemplated that morning? I contemplated running away! Honest, I was going to leave her and go further north—leave her holding her love for me in her two little hands. But she saved me from that, just as she saved me from everything else.

"Early the next morning my landlady rapped on my door and said Patty was waiting for me down-stairs. I went down. She was standing in the hall in her furs—the old man spent a great deal on her dress, out of his defiant pride—and I tell you she was pretty! She was straight—you can see how she is now, and she'll be forty soon—and her big black eyes were brilliant and her black hair showed under her cap and her red blood was in her cheeks—good blood, too! She didn't smile when I took her hands in mine and kissed her; she was just calm.

"'Father said this morning he told you last night we must not marry,' she said. 'He classed you with Red Pete. Have you thought what we'll do?'

"She was so cool, so self-reliant that some of my fear vanished for a moment.

"'I won't give you up, Patty,' I said.

"There was some astonishment in the straight, level glance she gave me.

"'Of course not,' she said. 'That didn't occur to you, did it?'

"I lied to her; I couldn't do anything else. I think she didn't quite believe me.

"'We'd better go for a walk,' she said. 'We'll go up in the woods.'

"In those days the village was just at the edge of the woods; it's all cleared now. We went up into them, and their quiet was beginning to have its effect on my nerves when we came upon Red Pete, hunting. At sight of us he stopped and shifted his gun to the crook of his left arm. He advanced with a smile on his ugly mouth.

"'Hay, Pattee!' he cried.

"And then without noticing me he walked up to her and kissed her on the lips before she could stir. He stepped back, stared at her as she stood there like a statue, flung up his hand with a laughing cry and was gone.

"I couldn't look at the girl, though I knew she had her eyes on me. I expected she would break out into abuse; I hoped she would—I deserved it richly enough. But after a few minutes she only said quietly:

"'If I'd thought you weren't going to strike him, I would have done it.'

"Yes, that was salt on an open wound. I could hardly get my breath. And still I couldn't look at her. Then she came close to me. I shrank from her; she had the drop of Indian blood in her, you remember. But she only took my hand.

"'Come,' she said; and her voice had the quality of a mourning-dove's complaint.

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"'Where?' I asked.

"'To the priest's,' she said. 'We must be married.'

"In an hour she was my wife, and with those snow-shoes on our feet we were hitting the trail for the lumber-camp. By night we were installed in a cabin and she was fixing up my half-frozen feet. We had walked without stopping, except to eat the food she had brought. I was nearly dead, but she showed no change except that the color in her cheeks had spread up to her eyes.

"In the morning we woke to a frozen world. She built a fire and got breakfast. Then she led me to the door of the cabin. She pointed up the trail.

"'The camp is about a mile,' she said. 'Go up there and go to work among those *men!*'

"There was scarcely any feeling in her voice—least of all scorn. She pushed me gently through the door and closed it on me. I went up the trail."

AS HE paused, his wife came to the door which led to their rooms behind the store.

"I want some sugar, John," she said.

As she stood waiting for the sugar, the traveler surveyed her. The dark eyes, the black hair, the good blood showing through the skin were still hers. She was a matron now—a mother—but the magnificence of her girlhood had not all disappeared. The traveler could well imagine how she had looked the morning she had pushed her newly wedded husband through the cabin door.

Hammersley came back and took his seat after he had filled his pipe once more.

"The first month in that camp was torture," he said. "I was a soft-handed clerk come to work among men of iron. Why, the first day a falling tree crushed a man's leg nearly off, and he *sat up* in a bob-sled while they hustled him off to a doctor! It made me sick. They were short-handed in the camp—a bunch of the men had got a drink of whisky and had gone for more and weren't back yet—and the boss put me on. The men quickly discovered what a tenderfoot I was, and they had their fun with me. Every night I went home ready to give up, but there was Patty as calm as a snow-capped pine on a still night, and I just had to go on. It used to take me half an hour to get loosened up enough in the morning to move about. Oh, but I was surely stiff!

"Well, that lasted for a month, and one morning I woke up and found I wasn't sore. I moved my muscles and there was a strength in them that I had never known. Another month went by. One night I was coming down the trail and I saw Patty standing in the doorway.

"'Hi, there!' I cried, and I took off my cap and waved it and ran down to her and picked her up in my arms.

"As she lay against my breast she began to shiver and then she dropped her head to my shoulder and cried. The white girl in her had come to the top; the drop of Indian blood was lost somewhere; and it didn't find itself again that evening.

"I didn't understand what was going on in her head, and all my coaxing and petting couldn't bring it out. She only led me to a mirror.

"'Look,' she said.

"I guess I hadn't looked at myself in all the time we'd been up there. I'd get up in the morning and wash in ice-water and be off, and at night I had always been too weary to think about my appearance. Well, I'd been transformed. My beard had grown all over my chin and my mustache was as long as an Italian barber's. But what hit me hardest was my eyes. They were bigger, I do believe, and they shone like the lake in June, just as blue.

"'Say,' I said to Patty, 'I look fine, don't I?'

"'Yes,' she said in a queer voice. 'Roll up your sleeves.'

"I did, and I'm —— if my arms weren't like whip-lashes from skin to bone! I took a deep breath and my chest came up. For the first time in my life I knew what physical manhood felt like. But still I didn't understand Patty.

"I got more proof of myself next day. Just as we were quitting, some of the fellows who lived in camp got to wrestling. They had a great time tumbling about in the snow. I stood by, grinning, because it was a sight to make your blood race. Suddenly one of the men noticed me.

"'What're you grinning at, you bum?' he cried good-naturedly; and he came at me.

"For a minute I had a sickish feeling in the pit of my stomach. It was only fun, but it was rough fun. I'd never been in physical contact with a man before, and I didn't know what to do. It was not till he

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had slammed me down from his hip, nearly knocking the breath out of me, that I felt any fighting spirit. Then I got to my feet somehow and went after him. I don't know what happened, but I wrestled in earnest while he was in fun. In five minutes I had him on his back. I shook myself free of him and ran down the trail, the men sending wild cheers and cries after me.

In the middle of the woods I stopped and began to laugh. My heart was full and my body ached with the joy of what I had done. I was like a child in my delight.

"Then I suddenly stopped laughing and found myself gazing up through the big trees at the cold stars. The joy died out of me. In a flash I had come to understand my wife and her desire.

"I went the rest of the way down the trail slowly, soberly. Patty met me at the door. I took her face in my hands, and we stood eye to eye as we had never stood before. She looked at me without moving an eyelid.

"'In the Spring,' I said, 'as soon as they begin to send the logs down, I'm going into the village—to find Red Pete.'

"'Oh—ah!' she said; and her eyes went shut over the two tears that leaped to them. 'I'll go with you.'

II

"IT WAS the first of April before we got out of the woods. We had a hard journey down, for the snow was melting and the roads when we got to them were a foot deep in mud. For two miles we dodged along the rail fences. The village certainly looked good when we came in sight of it.

"We hastened here to the store first to see the old man. Patty was a dutiful girl in her own way, and she had grieved about her father in his loneliness. He saw us coming and he barred the door with his big body.

"'No, you don't,' he cried! 'You can't come in here. You made your choice and you can abide by it. You can't come sponging on me.'

"My wife drew herself up, and you can believe it would have taken more than an old man's resentment to awe her. The woods hadn't had the chance to do as much for her as they had done for me, but they had done a lot.

"'We don't want to sponge on you, father,' she said. 'We've been working in the woods all Winter and we have our money. We only came to see how you were getting along.'

"'You've been in the woods?' he said, with an incredulous laugh. 'What you been doin' in the woods?'

"'Logging,' I said proudly.

"'Logging!' he said. 'You logging!'

"I took out my wallet.

"'Yes,' I said, 'and there's the money for it.'

"His eyesight wasn't as good as it had been, and he leaned toward me and peered at me.

"'You going to get Red Pete?' he demanded. 'The village has been laughing at you all Winter about him kissin' Patty and you doin' nothin'.'

"'That's what we came down for,' I said.

"'Well,' he said, 'you go get him, and then come back and talk to me.'

"I LOCATED Red Pete in the hotel bar, as I knew I should if he were in the village. I sent word to him to come outside. He came to the doorway and stood looking at Patty and me. I was glad that he was not drunk.

"'Hay, Pattee!' he cried, just as he had cried that other day.

"Then he came down the steps and made straight for her, the evil smile on his ugly lips again. The barroom poured out its crowd of loafers. Men stopped their teams in the street; others came to doorways. They sensed something unusual, I guess.

"Red Pete was within three feet of Patty. She did not stir, but gazed straight at him, her head up and her hands at her sides. Then I stepped in front of her. Red Pete blinked once or twice and threw back his head and laughed.

"Then he spat in my face! I heard Patty gasp; a murmur ran through the crowd. Their smiles died on their faces. You could murder a man for what Red Pete had done. I took out my handkerchief and wiped my face slowly. Red Pete must have seen something in me that he had not seen before. He took one backward step, his face suddenly convulsed with hate. He jerked up his hand; there was a knife in it.

"I dodged under the knife and got his wrist. The knife clattered to the boardwalk. I released him and stepped back.

"'Now, come on, Pete!' I said; and I add-

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ed in a whisper a name so vile that even his red blood couldn't stand it.

"He came at me for the wrestling fight that an Indian wants. I smashed my fist into his face and his knees weakened.

"'That's for the kiss you gave my wife!' I said. 'Now, come on, your way!'

"The moment we grappled I knew I could take my time. The woods that had given me health and strength were at my back now, looking down at me, approving the thing I was doing.

"I crushed Red Pete in my arms till his ribs cracked. I bent and twisted his arms till he moaned in pain. I worried his dirty face with the heel of my hand. I whispered curses in his ears. I said I was going to kill him. He began to whimper, and then to plead.

"And then an awful anger swept over me. I got Red Pete down. I saw Patty's cold face in the woods that morning; I heard her words—bitterer words than any she could have used in accusation. My hand found Red Pete's throat. It was soft under my fingers. I closed his wind-pipe. He stopped moaning. I exerted all my strength and shoved his face away from me till I thought I would tear it from his shoulders. I had him at the door of death, and I felt a mad joy as I began to shove him through. Then Patty put her hands on my shoulders and pulled me back.

"'Enough!' she said. 'Let him up. Don't kill him!'

"I dragged myself away from Pete. He lay still so long that the crowd got frightened. They took him into the saloon and revived him. Then, taking courage from what I had done, they ran him out of the village that night. He never came back.

"You see the Indian blood in Patty was only a drop, stranger, and she was satisfied with less than would have satisfied me, once I got started. I'd have murdered the red wolf that day."

THE LUCKY GIRL FROM OLYMPIA

BY LLOYD WILLIAMS*

"GOOD-BY?'

Perhaps her fan moved a trifle faster as she asked the question, but the tone of her voice was indifferent, and from the expression in her eyes you might suppose her thoughts were a few thousand miles away.

"Isn't it a trifle sudden?" she added.

"I made up my mind last night. This morning I booked my passage, and tomorrow I clear."

She turned to him with a brilliant smile. His quick decision appealed to her American instincts. She would never have believed that a Londoner could get such a move on himself.

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"You'll make a good American some day," she said, with a hint of the mischief in her eyes that he had learned to know so well. "Will you be gone long?"

"Probably as long as I live."

"Oh!" Her eyes drooped, but she asked her next question in a tone of such marked indifference that, if he had not been as stupid as an owl—or a man—he might have snatched at the hope it conveyed. "And where do you think of going?"

"I shall go West. It's a superstition with us English, you know, to go West." He seated himself on the settee by her side, tucking up his long legs as neatly as possible. "I have to thank you for it."

She wrinkled up her brow charmingly and made a grimace.

"It's just sweet of you to say that. Did I frighten you away?"

But he was one of those big-boned giants who are impervious to feminine teasing. He nodded cheerfully.

"You haven't frightened me," he said. "But I think you have electrified me. You have made me realize what a silly ass I am. That was why I wanted to sit out this dance. I've got to do the straight thing and explain matters."

"I'm all attention," she said meekly.

"It isn't very easy for an American girl to understand what it is to be the younger son of a younger son in this dear, rotten old country of mine. I should make a very decent navvy, because I'm as strong as a horse. But I'm really not fit for anything else. I am a pauper without visible, or invisible, means of existence. Last night I asked you to marry me."

"So you did. I remember it now," she murmured. "Sometimes the human memory is capable of these extraordinary feats. You said I was the only girl in the world."

It must be admitted that she was very irritating. But it was wholly wasted on the Hon. Berkeley Watt.

"Those were my very words," he muttered, "and, by Jove, they hit it off!"

Apparently he thought it an original phrase. She glanced at him with eyes that had softened visibly, but he was examining the toes of his boots and missed it.

"You refused me," he went on, "and as long as I live I shall always be grateful to you for that."

Miss Luck's back stiffened, but she smiled graciously.

"I suppose I must try to get used to this odious flattery," she whispered.

"If you had accepted me, I should have been ashamed of myself for the rest of my life," he said. "I wasn't quite straight with you. I didn't tell you everything. I'm going to tell you now, and—and it makes me feel like a cur! I was after your money."

SHE was not smiling now. A spot of color had sprung into each cheek, and she stared at him with open anger and contempt.

"I don't think you need explain any further," she said, with the slightly exaggerated drawl which always came into her voice when she was annoyed.

"I must. You've got to hear it. Men like me, who are absolutely no good to any one, are brought up with the idea that the only profession open to them is to marry a girl with money. I suppose we accept it without much thought. When you came over, and I met you, I made up my mind that I—I——"

"That you would adopt me as a profession," she said coolly.

"Yes, I was cad enough for that. The worst of it was, or, perhaps, the best of it, that I really fell in love with you. Then I began to see what sort of chap I was. When you turned me down last night, I was badly cut up. But I knew it was best. I might not have had the courage to tell you the whole truth, and I should have felt as if I had won you under false pretenses." He stopped suddenly, and added, "That's about all."

Her fan was now going about one hundred and twenty beats to the minute.

"This is a long dance," she said.

But he took no notice of the broad hint.

"If you hadn't twopence in the world, I should think myself the luckiest chap on earth if you'd have me," he said.

"I wonder."

She had turned her fine eyes full upon him, and the tone of her voice was deliberately insulting. He had hurt her a moment before, unintentionally, and she had returned the jab with compound interest, girl-fashion.

He colored with shame.

"You are entitled to say that," he murmured humbly. "But you may believe me. I am a wrong-headed fellow, but I'm a rotten liar. Good-by."

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He was standing, holding out his hand. But Miss Luck could not, or would not, see it.

Almost for the first time in her life, Miss Luck of Olympia, State of Washington, U. S. A., was hesitating. But he didn't know that. He believed he had offended her beyond forgiveness.

"You are the only girl in the world for me, but I have just enough decency to know that I'm not up to it," he whispered. "Good-by!"

II

ELIZABETH LUCK—she signed her drafts Bessie Luck, because she hated the name Elizabeth—was having the time of her life in London.

"Top-hole" was the expression she favored in letters to Olympia.

She had made scores of friends, partly by virtue of her good looks and high spirits; partly by virtue of the dollars, which a credulous world had multiplied by ten.

She was rich enough to be the catch of the London season, and set all the fortune-hunters galloping for the prize, and pretty enough to be worthy of a better fate.

But Miss Luck had no illusions. She knew her own worth and the worth of her dollars. Her father had left her enough real estate to make an average English duke happy and a store in Olympia which was more profitable than most gold mines.

Miss Luck managed her own affairs, and managed them extremely well. Every week the store figures were cabled over to her, and if the figures were not satisfactory the sole proprietress cabled for reasons why, and so forth.

Once, when she was believed to be in Paris buying frocks, she turned up in Olympia unexpectedly and had a beat-up of the staff which was described as "the best day's hunting since the time of Nimrod." Two heads of departments and four junior salesmen were fired, and the survivors learned a new prayer for use at bedtime: "Bless our Elizabeth, and keep her—far away from us."

Miss Luck did not rage like a whirlwind in matters of business. She was really quite calm and gentle. She had learned a valuable lesson from Daddy.

"Never get excited about business, Bess," he used to say. "Get facts."

London appreciated the young lady highly. They called her the Lucky Girl from Olympia, because she had a knack of scoring a goal every time. When they took her to race-meetings, Miss Luck always found the winners. On one occasion she ticked off four in succession with her eyes shut, and the story was told in every club in London in tones of awe. Absurd things of this kind impress people far more than real ability.

And yet, for all her abounding fortune and natural decision of character, "Daddy's gal," as she sometimes called herself, was not happy that evening.

ON THE previous day, she had refused the Hon. Berkeley Watt. She could hardly have explained why. Perhaps refusing attractive members of the British nobility was a habit that was growing on her. Perhaps he asked at the wrong time or in the wrong way.

Girls refuse men for a score of insufficient reasons; they also accept them on equally unsatisfactory grounds.

It may be that Bessie took it for granted that Mr. Watt would ask again.

Whatever it was, Mr. Watt's full confession left her in a state of mental confusion which was unusual. His statement that he had been "after her money" was not really a shock to her, though she chose to pretend that it was. Over and over again she had whispered to herself,

"I don't believe he really cares. He's only making goo-goo eyes at my little rubbish-heap."

The truth was that six feet of muscular, unintellectual manhood laying its soul bare for her inspection had taught her things not included in the schedule at the High School.

She believed him.

She might have kept him by her side by a glance or a word.

"You are the only girl in the world for me, but I have just enough decency to know that I'm not up to it."

The words rang true. They rang the truer because he had not hung around, on the chance of a reprieve, but had taken himself off as briskly as if he had sprung out of a shotgun.

"That's the worst of these slow men," she reflected; "they move so quickly."

During the evening she danced with Mr. Watt's best pal. Johnnie Frye was a

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wealthy youth who regarded his penniless friend as the greatest and wisest man born into a sorrowing world since the time of Moses.

After waltzing round the room twice, Miss Luck announced her sweet intention of "sitting out" the rest of it.

Johnnie beamed with satisfaction and said it was a "fearfully good idea."

"So your friend, Mr. Watt, is going abroad," she said, with an air of indifference which would not have deceived any one but Johnnie Frye.

He frowned portentously and said the news had come upon him as a "fearful shock."

"Simply can't understand it, Miss Luck. Dear old Doggie's been——"

"Why do you call him Doggie?" she inquired distantly.

Johnnie looked puzzled. He was never very clever at stating the reason why.

"Dunno, I'm sure," he muttered. "All the boys call him Doggie. I think it's because Berkeley's such a rotten name." His face brightened visibly. "That must be it. Dogs bark and his name's Berkeley. I don't know how chaps think of these fearfully good things. Do you see it?"

"I am trying to," said Miss Luck sweetly.

"Well, old Doggie's been picked to play for Middlesex against Yorkshire, and now he's turned it up. I simply can't understand a chap doing a thing like that. There's no sense in it. You mark my words, there's a gal in this, Miss Luck."

"Do you think so?" she said incredulously. "Is—is Mr. Watt that sort of man?"

"Rather not," said Johnnie indignantly. "Never knew him do such a silly thing. But he's just the sort of chap gals go wild over."

"Is he?" inquired Miss Luck in real astonishment, for this view of the matter had never occurred to her.

"It's because he takes no notice of 'em," explained Johnnie with a confidential nod. "Treats 'em like dirt."

"How rude!"

"That's my poetical way of expressing myself," explained Johnnie hastily. "But I wish I knew who the gal was that's turned him up. I'd love to give her a bit of my mind."

"I'm sure it would do her a world of good," said Miss Luck with a sweet gravity which warmed Johnnie's heart.

"Ah, I wish he had taken a fancy to you," he murmured. "You wouldn't go and ruin a chap's life for him."

"Is Mr. Watt's life ruined, then?"

"Rather. Why, now he's improved on the leg side of the wicket, he's certain to be picked for England next year! But it's no good to cry over spilt milk. There'll be no more cricket for Doggie. He's off to-morrow. One thing is, I know how it'll end," he added gloomily.

Miss Luck felt she would be glad to know how it would end.

"Do tell me," she murmured.

"Middlesex'll be licked next week, and then the bloomin' championship will go north," said Johnnie impressively. "And all for the sake of a silly gal!"

Miss Luck rose to her feet.

"I think I'd like to dance," she said meekly, and Johnnie observed that this was a "fearfully good idea."

MISS LUCK was not at all impressed by the impending tragedy of "Middlesex getting licked, and the bloomin' championship going north." But she returned home at about four o'clock in the morning with the conviction that for the first time in her life she had hesitated the sixty-fourth part of a second too long.

Instead of going to bed, as a girl who had been dancing for six hours should have done, she let her sleepy maid yawn a little longer and sat down at her writing-table.

Then she wrote the kind of letter that only the nicest sort of girl in the world could write. Unfortunately, it happened to be the kind of letter that the nicest sort of girl in the world couldn't possibly send.

She tore it up and wrote another.

The next was a very commonplace affair. She merely mentioned the fact that she would be riding in the Park the following morning at the usual hour, and that, if Mr. Watt had time for a canter before he left town, she would be delighted to see him.

She placed this on her toilet-table and decided that a footman could take it round to Mr. Watt's rooms early in the morning. Then the yawning maid was permitted to undress her mistress's hair.

But suddenly a small white hand shot out, seized the note, tore it up and dropped the fragments in a tidy. Miss Luck was dissatisfied with her composition. Cécile

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must wait a moment. She would dash off another letter.

Cécile was in despair, but only shrugged her shoulders.

As a matter of fact, Miss Luck did not "dash" her letter off; she wrote it slowly and laboriously. It was to the effect that she hoped Mr. Watt would "strike it rich" when he went West; she hoped he would be lucky; she hoped he would some day return safely to his "dear, rotten old country;" she hoped that she would see him again.

Once more Cécile resumed her duties. Trinkets and ornaments were removed; mysterious and wonderful hooks and eyes were unfastened.

Her young ladyship was ready for bed; actually between the sheets. Cécile, with her fingers on the switch, looked round the room.

"Is there anything else, mam'zelle?"

"Nothing, Cécile. I've kept you up. I'm sorry."

Cécile smiled beatifically. Everybody smiled when Miss Luck wished them to do so.

"It is a pleasure, mam'zelle."

The light was switched off; Cécile had nearly escaped.

"Cécile."

Cécile sighed, and switched on the light again. Young ladyship is sitting bolt upright in bed.

"Give me that letter, Cécile."

The maid fetched it. It was torn up—a trifle viciously.

"I simply won't say anything at all," remarked Miss Luck.

Once more the light was switched off; Cécile escaped finally and triumphantly.

And Miss Luck, being quite alone and in the dark, where no one could spy on her, cried herself to sleep for the first time in her life.

Nothing in the world could be less like "Daddy's gal" than that.

III

ON A SUNDAY morning two men sat in the shadow of a log cabin in the midst of corn-fields; the corn-fields being, for all practical purposes, in the midst of prairie. One of the men appeared to be about thirty; he was big in the bone, burnt nearly black, skinny and tough looking. The other was a mere lad, some eighteen years of age. His head was swathed in bandages, and he looked sick and ill.

"How long have you been living this kind of life?" inquired the boy.

"Five years."

"Pretty sick of it, ain't you, Doggie?"

"It's all right."

"You haven't made much money."

"Manage to rub along all right," said the big man, letting his eyes wander over the land.

There was a pause, and the boy sucked his pipe contentedly. It was his first pipe for nearly two months.

"I wonder what made you come," he muttered.

The big man parried the question with another, asked with knit brows:

"I wonder what made you come, a kid like you."

The boy's white face flushed crimson, but he said nothing.

Again there was silence, and again it was broken by the boy.

"How long have I been sick?"

"Seven weeks."

"And you've looked after me all the time?"

"Had to."

The boy put his hand to his head and fingered it very gently.

"Bit of a bash-in, wasn't it?"

"Pretty well."

"Reckon you nursed me night and day. I say, Doggie—" the boy leaned forward, holding out a white hand shyly—"shake hands with a chap."

"Oh, shut up!" said the big man, with almost equal shyness. "We won't make a fuss about it. Here, I've got something to show you."

He strode into the cabin, and presently came out with a tattered copy of an English newspaper. He tossed it into the boy's lap.

"I want you to look at it. I came across it a fortnight ago."

Then he stood staring across the land and prairie at the blue horizon, with his back turned to the boy.

The passage indicated in the paper was an advertisement in the Personal column:

> Teddie B. Everything settled and forgiven. Your mother is ill. Come home for her sake, and mine. Father.

This time the silence was a long one.

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"Well?" said the big man at last, with his back still turned to the boy.

"It's me all right. But—but how did you guess?"

"You raved a bit sometimes, and—and I picked up a few odds and ends."

"What have I got to do, Doggie?" asked the boy in a low voice.

The answer came like the bang of a drum:

"Go home to your mother, you young ass!"

"But you—you don't know all—all about it."

"I could make a tidy guess."

"I made a particular kind of fool of myself. I—I was in a bank, and I—you know what I mean." The boy hung his head, and for the first time the older man turned round and looked at him shrewdly. But he said nothing. "The old man took it pretty badly, and—and I cut for it; came out here," added the boy.

"You were a thief," said the big man curtly, and the boy winced. "It's best to call things by their names, my lad. Then you know just where you stand. I suppose your father has made good and you can go back. When you get home, you've got to pay him back every cent. See what I mean?"

"I'll do that, Doggie; honor bright."

"You're not the only chap who's dirtied his hands with mean work," added the big man gruffly. "I don't know but what I've been worse than you. Years ago I met a girl with a pot of money. I wanted her money. I tried to get her to marry me. You see I didn't actually steal it, but I had the instinct of the sneak-thief."

"Not many people look at it like that."

"It doesn't matter how people look at things, young fellow. You must look at 'em yourself with your own eyes. I might have been a very successful class of thief, but at the last moment I found I had made a mistake." He laughed gruffly. "I discovered that I didn't want the girl's money at all; I wanted the girl. It made all the difference. Luckily for me, she turned me down. If she hadn't, I should have felt like an unconvicted criminal for the rest of my life."

"You're a sight harder on yourself than you are on other people," said the boy shrewdly. "Is that the girl whose photograph is in the——"

"You mind your own business, my lad," said the big man with a grin. "Now, I'll get a cable form and you'll send off a message to your father. I'll ride into town with it to-morrow. After that, you can have a shot at peeling potatoes. It'll do you good."

"Right-O, Doggie."

"And look here, young chap." The big man paused in the doorway. "When you get back to England, don't imagine you're too much of a gentleman to peel potatoes. You cry 'snap' to the first job that comes your way, and freeze on to it tight."

IV

THE big man was alone again once more.

A year before he had dragged the boy out of a saloon, where he was making a considerable fool of himself and had fallen into bad company. The boy was obviously English, and the big man literally hauled him out by the scruff of his neck, tossed him into the buggy and drove him home.

Then he took him in hand as if he had been a younger brother; cursed him and bullied him and made him work. Little by little he imparted something of his own stiffness of fiber to the lad, who was well meaning enough, but had got side-tracked.

For months all went well. The boy showed signs of developing into a man, and he whistled at his work, which is the best sign in the world.

Then the accident happened. The boy was bringing the team home from a distant part of the land when he tripped and got the top of his head bashed in by a horse's heel. The big man carried him for two miles in his arms, because he feared the jolting of a cart would kill him. Then he galloped for the doctor, who stayed with them two days.

"He may pull through," said the medical man casually, "but it's long odds against him. Don't envy you your nursing job, Doggie."

Nevertheless, the boy did get well; well enough to go home.

The big man missed him; missed him the more because he had done so much for him. One or two letters came, but had it not been for his work, for the crops and the land, and one or two scraps of memory, the big man might have been lonely.

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Months passed; the Winter came and went.

ONE day in the Spring the big man was tramping along behind his team, when he espied a figure on horseback, far away on the horizon. He shaded his eyes with his hands, but could make nothing of the approaching visitor.

Presently, coming nearer to his shanty, he went inside and fetched a pair of glasses. For a long time he studied the distant figure. Then, suddenly, he put down the glasses and, forgetting to put on a jacket, unhitched a horse, jumped on its back and set out.

That was how they met; she in a smart riding habit that would have done credit to the Row; he in his shirt-sleeves. She had heaps to say; so much, indeed, that he was hardly allowed to speak. She was in high spirits and just as frank and unconventional as she had ever been.

Heavens, how she talked and talked and talked!

She had been home to Olympia; had a season in New York, had a high time in Paris, Venice, London and everywhere else. No, she was not married; had not yet annexed a coronet; didn't know that she wanted one.

She was staying with Governor Trench, twelve miles away; felt as if she really must gallop over and see him.

Of course, no young lady ought to gallop twelve miles over unbroken land, but all her life she had done things that no young lady ought to do, and it was useless to argue.

THEY came to his shanty, and she must see everything, absolutely everything. So she wandered around, passing remarks and offering impertinent criticism, while he fussed about, preparing tiffin.

"But how did you know I was here?" he inquired. It was the first time he had been allowed to say half a dozen consecutive words. "This isn't exactly a holiday resort." And he waved his arms in the direction of empty distances.

She laughed softly, and for the first time showed signs of embarrassment:

"I met a friend of yours."

"You don't mean old Johnnie Frye?"

"Oh, dear, no! Johnnie's come into the title and is unhappily married in the usual way. He still raves about you, and attributes the decline in English cricket solely to the fact that you left the country."

"But who was it, then?"

"A nice boy named Teddie Brock."

"Oh, that chap. He's a nice little fellow. He worked with me here for a time. Is he doing all right?"

"I think so. His father is a parson in the East End of London, and I went there with a party of people who were bent on doing good. They sang songs for two hours to a lot of poor old people who had never done them a bit of harm. Of course, I flirted with Teddie. He told me heaps of things." She paused and added: "Heaps and heaps of things."

"It doesn't do to believe all you hear," he said gruffly.

She changed the conversation.

"Is this the office?"

"It's the office, so-called," he said with a grin. "These are my books."

"You keep accounts, then?"

"Rather. I went to a night-school and learned it like a kid. You must do something in the Winter, you know."

"And so you really have my photograph," she remarked calmly. "That was how Master Teddie knew me. He said, 'Miss Luck, you're the girl whose photograph I've been living with for twelve months.' Then it all came out, you know."

"I see. The boy seems to be a chatterbox." He was blushing shamefacedly. "I keep it there just to—just to look at."

She raised her eyebrows delightfully:

"I think I ought to be rather flattered, don't you?"

"I think you ought to be rather hungry," he grunted. "Do come and have a feed."

He rode back with her to within sight of Governor Trench's house, but declined to enter it, and they parted with a cheery handshake.

V

AFTERWARD he returned to his lonely shanty, slowly and thoughtfully. It was as if an angel had sprung out of Heaven, visited him for a short space, and then vanished. He felt elated, thrilled; and yet, in a vague way, disappointed.

For days he roamed about, doing no

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work, but living it all over again dreamily.

He no longer felt alone. She had peopled the wilderness for him. She had stood in the shadow of his shanty and wandered beneath its roof. Her mare had been tethered right there. She had talked to him about his crops and the Winter frost and the railway rates. She had sat by his side and eaten his bread. She had laughed at him and, in a certain, quiet way, approved of him and his works.

During those days he hardly entered the shanty. The open land and blue sky seemed to speak of her, and he loved to look across at the horizon and remember how he had felt when he first knew she was coming.

Then one day he found himself wandering about the shanty. He stood in the corner, politely called the "office." Her photograph was there and he——

He made the oddest, absurdest discovery a man could make.

When he saw it he first grinned and then threw back his head and laughed aloud.

In front of her framed photograph stood a small tin pie-dish.

It was covered with a layer of pie-crust and looked like a votive offering laid before a mystic shrine.

She had left it there, and he walked round it, man-fashion, and picked it up and put it down again, grinning broadly at the whimsical joke.

Then it dawned upon him that it might mean something; it might have a significance, and he scratched his head solemnly and thought with all his might. "Doggie" Watt was not a quick man, but he usually arrived at his destination within a trifle of scheduled time.

Hours passed in a fever of speculation. Then it occurred to him to open it.

It was empty and he——

No, it was not empty. There was a scrap of paper inside, with one word scrawled on it:

HUMBLE.

"Humble pie!"

He saw it now. It was a hint, a plain hint!

PROPERLY speaking, that is the end—or, if you prefer it, the beginning—of the story. If "Doggie" Watt had never hurried before, he hurried now. He rode for dear life to Governor Trench's house, and of course learned that she had already left. He thought Trench grinned at him when he told him the news.

Then he drew all his available cash out of the bank, put a neighbor in charge of his land and set out for England. She was half-way across the Atlantic when he sailed.

"She'll make me run for it," he chuckled. "That's just like her. But I'll catch her, if she runs to Calcutta!"

He sent mad cables after her, and talked very seriously to the first officer about the ridiculously slow progress the steamer made.

The train from Liverpool to London did its seventy miles an hour, but it wasn't fast enough for Doggie. He made his way to the Guard's brake, and explained to him what a number of things English railways had to learn from other countries.

She was staying at the Cecil and knew to a minute or so when he would arrive. As he entered the hotel by one door she left it by another and mounted an omnibus.

Finally, he caught her, in the neighborhood of Hoxton, and she actually had the impudence to pretend to be surprised to see him.

And then, the great moment having arrived, he didn't know what to say.

"I've come over," he mumbled, "to—to——"

"On business?" she suggested sweetly.

He swore the most popular oath in the English language.

"It's to eat humble pie," he said breathlessly.

He went on to explain that he was a positive glutton for it. He wanted to live on humble pie for the rest of his life.

It was only then that he saw a tenderness in her eyes which he might have seen before had he known when to look.

"You dear, silly man!" she whispered. "You have misunderstood me."

His heart sank.

"I am the person who must eat humble pie. I never ought to have let you go away. But——"

They left the 'bus and chartered a taxi for the return journey to the Cecil.

There are many reasons for which a taxicab is to be preferred to the top of an omnibus.

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THE MAN-HUNT

A TALE OF THE AUSTRALIAN BUSH

BY L. WARBURTON

ONE hundred and ten in the water-bag! A "snorter" of a hot day, as Mulga Mick put it, even for a Western Australian Summer. The blacks actually drooped under it, and lay about the homestead in naked listlessness. The flies almost ceased from troubling, and the usually rowdy cockatoos in the big trees were silent, except for an occasional screech when great strips of bark, peeled from the gums by the heat, fell to the ground.

Under the shade of a big eucalyptus, whose gaunt arms drooped over the stock-yard of Clune's sheep-station, Mick Donovan lay prone on his belly, his head pillowed on his folded arms. Out of a half-closed eye he watched a big *gohanna** sneak from a heap of bark, take post near the lower rail, and greedily polish off the flies that unsuspectingly settled within reach of his tongue.

Mick felt the heat terribly. He was still suffering a recovery from his periodical visit to the Bummer's Rest, a wayside shanty kept by one Burke—"Mister Tim Burke," when a drink was wanted on credit, and "that blanky cow Burke," when a big fat check was to be liquidated. Near the prostrate Mick sat Mounted Constable John Drummond, industriously cleaning his Winchester and softly whistling a verse of "The Wild Colonial Boy."

"Pretty hot, Mick," said the big policeman.

"'Ot? I calls it 'orrid 'ot, John, me bhoy. 'Otter nor the 'obs of 'ell," answered the station roustabout, without stirring a muscle or an eyelid.

"The weather for a big pot at Burke's, Mick. One of those with an inch of froth on it," added Drummond, casually cocking his eye to the muzzle of his rifle, and watching the glint of sunlight on the polished bore.

"Fur the love of hiven stop ut, yer great hulkin' fiend av tormint! If it wasn't fur the respict Oi have fer yer unifor-r-m Oi'd be minded to git up and break the jaw av ye. Big pots wid the cool froth on 'em, a day like this whin Oi've got a t'irst ye

* *Gohanna* is really iguana, a huge lizard.

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couldn't quench wid the Pacific, and my throttle so hot thot it'd take a dozen pints to cool it, so's I could taste good liquor!"

"Tarpot!" A tousled head, and a fiery face protruded from the cook-house door, as the shrill voice smote the atmosphere: "Tarpot!"

A big buck native up-ended himself, walked majestically toward the face, answered, "Missus."

"Catch me a chicken; that struttin' galoot forninst there, wid the two fithers left to his tail."

There was an immediate flutter in the feathered harem, and with Tarpot after him, the selected victim for the station manager's supper fled with a cackle, looped the loop in successfully dodging the old brown hat that Mick threw at it as it passed over him, and landed on the top rail of the stockyard.

Tarpot carefully stalked behind the trees until he was opposite the bird. As he stood out from behind a mulga bush, the rooster saw him, and rose in flight. There was a whirr as Tarpot's boomerang spun through the air, and the bird's head went flying for yards, while its body fluttered spasmodically on the ground.

Mick's eyes opened wide, and turning to the policeman he said,

"Did ye see thot now? Fer the love of Mike, phwat do yer t'ink er thot?"

"Pretty good shot for the nigger," Drummond replied laconically.

He was an old bushman, and had seen the blacks bring down game of all kinds by such good shooting, so that he was not inclined to enthuse over Tarpot's marksmanship.

Mulga Mick was visibly disgusted.

"Good shot ye call it? Good shot, be cripes! Oi'd like to see a better! It's meself thot wouldn't give two shakes of a dead lamb's tail for a chanst to see the ould sod agin and shake a lig at Kilmainham fair ball, if thot nigger took a shot at me. Some shot, Jack Drummond? Now lookit here. They till me you can shoot wid that gun of yours, but Oi bet you a gallon of Tim Burke's best hop-juice that you couldn't beat Tarpot's shot."

Drummond ran an oiled rag over the barrel of his rifle, admired the well polished butt and stock, and turned to Mick.

"That's a bet, Mick; you're on. I'll make it a gallon of beer that I can shoot the head off any chicken up to one hundred yards," he said.

"Ye will?" said the Irishman excitedly.

"Yes," added Drummond, "and I'll bet you another gallon that I can do it at full gallop, if you make the distance less!"

"Well now, why, in the name of me ould grandfather's best pig, isn't Tim Burke's shanty jist over the track there? It's t'irsty I wouldn't be another minyit. Oh, Johnny Drummond, darlint, make it t'ree gallons all round, an I'll get Toby to bring up me ould horse, so's we won't lose more'n an hour before we drink thot beer."

"All right Mick," said the policeman, "that's a bet. Here Billy, Governor, Tarpot, Toby, run those chickens into the stockyard, and keep 'em there."

Then, slipping a couple of cartridges into the magazine of his Winchester, Drummond whistled up his horse, vaulted on its bare back, and trotted down the track a couple of hundred yards. Meanwhile the blacks, under the supervision of Mick, rounded up the chickens, and corralled them in the yard, a volley of stones and sticks keeping the stockyard in a feathered ferment.

SEEING everything in readiness, Drummond smacked his old horse with his broad-brimmed felt hat and charged down on the stockyard at full gallop, holding his rifle ready for a shot. As the trooper raced through the gateway, a big game-cock broke from the bunch and scurried, screeching, toward the far slip-rails. Gripping his horse's flanks with his knees, Drummond raised his weapon, took lightning aim and fired.

The bird turned half a dozen somersaults, and came to a stop against a post, its head blown to pieces! The horseman cleared the slip-rails at a bound, and a second later Drummond was on his way back, a smile of satisfaction wreathing his hard, sun-baked dial. With a yell of amazement, the natives fled for the bush, and Mulga Mick forgot in the excitement of the moment that he had lost his bet and was due for a rough time with Mister Burke when he asked for more credit, and dancing around the stockyard, flourishing the defunct rooster, yelled:

"He did it! be me soul, he did it! Jacky, my bhoy, ye're more didly than blackbhoy whisky," which to a connoisseur of good liquor is about the most fatal potion ever brewed.

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"You lose all right, Mick," Drummond said, after examining the victim of his unerring aim, "but that's a lucky shot."

"The divil it was, Mister John Drummond! Well, it's lucky enough to win you three gallons av beer at my expinse—if Oi iver pay fer it. Me compliments to thot ould cow Burke, and till him to treat ye on my score. An' whin might ye be goin' that way?"

"I'm due there to-night, Mick," the policeman replied; "but surely you are coming over with me to help drink that beer? I thought you had your old hat-rack all ready to gallop to Burke's?"

"Be aisy now, be aisy. Oi disremimbered thot, but Oi'll come wid ye, jist to kape an eye on ye an Miss Norah," Donovan replied, with a wink, twitting the trooper with his fondness for Burke's handsome girl.

A FEW hours later the two men were at Burke's shanty having the first instalment of the liquor won and lost over the bet, and Mick was telling everybody of the wonderful shooting done by his companion.

"Bhoys," he said, "'tis a most wonderful shot is the Constable, and 'tis meself who's tellin' yez, fer Oi saw him meself. The Constable he goes back six hunder' yards, while me an' Tarpot throws up the chickens wan after the ither, an' belave me or not, whoile Mister Drummond is gallopin' like the Old Un was after him, he shoots ivery birrd clane t'rough the head, as cool as Oi'm tellin' yez!" and the unblushing perverter of the truth actually turned to Drummond for confirmation of his version of the feat.

The trooper buried his face in his pewter, to avert the admiring glances of Miss Norah Burke, and having recovered his breath said,

"Mick's got to show that he lost his bet by a wonderful bit of shooting, but I shot only one bird, and did with the rifle what Tarpot had just done with his old boomerang—knocked the head off a rooster, because Mick bet me I couldn't beat a black fellow at chicken killing."

"That won't do, Mister Drummond," chimed in Burke, "'tis a foine shot ye are, and here's a health to ye," he added, tilting his glass. "I guess that troublesome mob of naygurs out at Doyle's station will disappear if you get after them. Oi did hear that they had been onaisy agin of late, spearin' sheep an' the loike."

"That's so," said the trooper; "I have been told to keep an eye on 'em because that mission nigger Wandy has got loose again and is threatening to play he— I beg pardon, Miss Norah. Wandy's a bad lot, I mean, and we've got to watch him. He has a knack of causing trouble among the tribes, and if he gets hold of a gun there'll be murder. I haven't seen or heard of him just lately. He must be out back, but I guess Doyle's men can look after themselves. My brother's out there, and he knows all about Wandy. He's at the out-station, but——"

The furious hoof-beats of a galloping horse on the graveled track leading from the main road to Burke's shanty caused Drummond to leave his sentence unfinished and rush with the others to the door, where they watched a horseman ride into the circle of dim light thrown by the saloon lamp, rein his horse to its haunches, and pitch to the ground, senseless. The startled onlookers picked him up and took him into the shanty.

"My God!" cried Burke, as he held the lamp to the face of the unconscious man, "it's Bill Collins, boundary-rider out at Doyle's! Holy Mary! What's the matter wid him?"

"Matter?" echoed Drummond. "Look at his shoulder."

He pointed as he spoke to the prostrate man, and kneeling in a pool of blood which trickled to the floor from a jagged wound in the fleshy part of the new arrival's shoulder, pulled a spear-head out and held it up before the gaze of the boys.

"Quick, Miss Norah!" the constable commanded, "some hot water and cloth, or he'll bleed to death. And Tim, a nobbler of brandy. He's just about all in. This means mischief with the niggers, and we'll have to get Collins' story quick if we want to do anything."

"It's thot imp of hill, Wandy!" wailed Mick. "Is the poor man killed?"

THE girl had returned with water and bandages, and assisted Drummond to stanch the flow of blood and bind up the wound, while the others stood round waiting for Collins to return to consciousness and tell his story, each expecting, however, that he would have a thrilling tale to relate, in which an attack by blacks on the lonely out-station would form the leading feature.

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Already the wounded man was beginning to stir and babble, and as Tim Burke poured another stiff brandy down his throat Collins opened his eyes and cried in terror, "Look out, Fred, break for it! Run for your horse!"

At the mention of his brother's name Drummond seized the wounded man and almost roughly shook him from his comatose condition, in his anxiety to hear Collins' story now that he knew his brother was concerned in it. He had feared this from the first, but had hoped that his brother might have been absent when the raid took place. Now he knew that others were in peril, and among them Fred Drummond, overseer of Mardi station. The trooper called to the wounded man,

"Collins, Collins, what's happened? For God's sake, man, speak! Where's Fred, and the others?"

The boundary-rider struggled to speak, and gave a wild and rambling story, the mere fragments of which, however, told the bystanders what had happened. The out-station had been "stuck-up" just at dusk by a mob of blacks in full war-paint, shots had been fired, and Collins had escaped by springing on his horse. Whether there were others, who they were, and what had happened to them, the wounded man was unable to tell before he again lapsed into unconsciousness and was bundled limply into a bunk to be cared for by Burke and his daughter. The trooper strode to the door, bade the company good night, and unhitched his horse.

"For the love of hiven, Mister Drummond," cried Burke, "where are ye goin'?"

"Straight to Doyle's," Drummond replied. "There's been murder out there, and I'll get there as quick as I can."

"Man, it's mad ye are," the saloon-keeper objected, "to be goin' this blessed night alone into a mob of howlin' hathin savages just after committin' murther, an' the divil knows what else! Wait till mornin' and take some of the boys wid you."

"No, Burke, I can't wait a minute," the trooper said impatiently. "The boys can come if they like, but I won't wait for 'em. Mick, you get straight back to the station and warn Turner that the blacks are on the warpath, and to keep a close eye on that bunch loafing round his place. I'll be all right. You boys follow me as soon as you can, and bring along all the others you can pick up. Good night."

With a clatter, Drummond disappeared in the darkness, the hoofs of his horse striking firelight from the flint stones. The watchers saw a shower of spray as the galloping horse dashed through the creek, and presently all they could hear was the faint hoof-beats dying in the distance.

COMING out on the main track, and reckless of fallen trees and rotten ground, the trooper put his horse into a swinging gallop and settled down for his thirty-mile ride, which with good luck he hoped to cover before dawn, although the best part of the journey lay over virgin bush with but a faint bridle-track to indicate the way.

After a couple of miles of furious riding Drummond reached a turn-off to the right and pulled up. Throwing himself to the ground, he examined the sandy soil and, finding there the tracks of a galloping horse, smiled with satisfaction. Although expert bushman enough to have found his way without any directions to Doyle's, or any other station within the huge territory which alone he had to patrol, Drummond was anxious to keep in the boundary-rider's tracks, knowing that by following them closely he would lose no time in reaching the out-station. Remounting, he walked his horse for a brief spell, which also gave him time to think of the night's doings.

Fred was his favorite brother, an accomplished bushman and the trusted overseer of Doyle's big run. Against the ordinary dangers of the bush Drummond knew his brother was quite capable of taking care of himself, and, given a reasonable chance, he could handle any natives who threatened danger, but from the broken utterances of the sick man back there in Burke's shanty it did not appear that the two or three men at the lonely homestead had had time to defend themselves against the blacks, whose methods of attack the trooper knew so well.

The natives, ordinarily, were quiet enough, but when those infernal renegades from the missions got loose trouble invariably followed. "Wanted" by the police for some crime around the mission, probably the abduction of a mission girl, or it might be a fancied insult to one of the missionaries, whose dignity was as immense

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as his ideas of civilizing black fellows were foolish, Wandy would bolt for the bush, and the first move he would make would be to secure firearms.

Drummond could see the whole story: The boastful black, returned to his tribe, vaunting his equality with the white men, and stirring up the bucks with stories of big feeds and an easy life once they could all handle a rifle. A raid on a station would be easily arranged, and just as easily managed, seeing that the whites had not been anticipating trouble, and then Wandy and his warriors would soon possess firearms with which to commit further misdeeds.

The lonely rider pictured the stealthy approach of the war party upon the station hut, just when the men would be tired or busy in the preparation of their evening meal; the naked, painted savages slipping from tree to tree and wriggling through the spinifex until they could hide themselves no longer. He saw the sudden uprising of a score of lithe figures, heard the yell of scorn, the rush of naked feet, the whiz of a shower of spears, and the *plunk, plunk, plunk* as they stuck quivering in the slab hut.

He heard Collins' warning yelled to his brother, saw the boundary-rider spring to his horse still nosing at the water-butt after its long day's hard work, and as he thought that possibly the man back there at Burke's had deserted his comrades when he should have stood by them, Drummond clenched his fists. Fred would fight while he had a chance, but if the natives had reached him before he could secure his revolver or rifle—poor Drummond dropped his head and felt sick. Recovering his composure, he stiffened himself, shook his horse into a gallop, and continued his lonely, frenzied ride.

The trooper held closely to the bridle-track, and his old horse, which was as well versed in bushcraft as himself, seemed to follow the path without difficulty, dodging jagged branches of fallen trees, hopping over the smaller obstacles, and propping and wheeling when he scented treacherous ground undermined by the wombats.

As they came to open spaces in the bush, ghostly kangaroos stirred from their slumbers and skipped hurriedly away. High in the trees the mopokes croaked their mournful calls; curlews far away in the swamp set up a chorus of alarms, and a dingo slunk across the track, followed by her hungry brood. Drummond came to a rock-hole, and unbuckling a canvas bucket from his saddle, filled it with water to slake the thirst of his horse, which whinnied as it scented the little reservoir.

Taking a long draft himself, the trooper looked up and noted in the east the first flush of the dawn, and once more mounted for the last mile of his long and lonely ride. He soon came to a wire fence, and finding a swing gate which told him he was entering a home paddock, leaned from his saddle and lifted the wire loop that held the gate shut. Spurring his tired mount, he rapidly came in sight of the little hut, and with tense feelings of concern noted the absence of smoke from the bark chimney, and the silence, when ordinarily there should have been movement of man and beast in preparation for the day's work.

Dashing across the little clearing, Drummond's horse swerved at a recumbent figure, and the trooper noted with grim satisfaction the stark form of an ocher-daubed savage. Throwing his reins loose, the anxious man slipped to the ground and ran round the hut. With a cry like that of a tortured being, he threw himself on a huddled-up form, and clasping his arms around it, drew the white face to the faint light of approaching day.

"Fred! Fred!" he called, and then quietly sank beside the dead body of the brother he had hoped to save.

FOR some minutes he lay thus, great sobs shaking his strong frame, and his lips quivering with emotion. Then he turned the body over, grasping as he did so the haft of a spear, and tenderly touching the battered head which revealed a gaping wound.

Lifting the body gently, he bore it into the hut, stepping in his way over the corpse of a second man whom he did not recognize. Having laid his brother on a bunk, Drummond again sought the open, carefully examining the neighborhood for signs of the murderous savages who had done their work only too well. Beyond a few spears and the litter of belongings of the dead men, which the natives had dragged into the open the better to rifle of their valuables, the trooper found nothing.

Once more he entered the hut, and lighting a slush-lamp, searched for firearms, but found none. The blacks had evidently

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seized whatever weapons the white men had possessed and had then decamped, but Drummond knew they would not be very far off, and as he thought of that he snapped his teeth and swore revenge. His first impulse was to get on their tracks at once, but a glance at his horse showed him that he could not travel far, for the faithful animal badly needed a spell and a chance to pick a feed from the little patch of grass around the windmill. Furthermore he did not care to leave his brother's body unburied, with the possibility of the natives returning, or the prowling dingoes molesting it, so he unsaddled his horse, and taking his blanket, lay down by the hut to rest a while.

Worry-worn and anguished, Drummond fell into a kind of doze, but his senses were still acute, and when at the end of a couple of hours he heard a crackling in the bush, he was on his feet in an instant with his rifle ready for action, and waiting for the first sign of danger.

As he moved, a voice shouted:

"Don't shoot, Drummond! I'm glad to find you alive," and the speaker stepped from behind a sapling and advanced.

The trooper recognized Bob Fraser, one of the station hands who were at Burke's the night before, and silently grasped his hand.

"Bad news, Drummond?" the other asked, correctly interpreting the silence.

Drummond nodded, and lead the way into the hut.

"Dead!" he ejaculated, as they gazed on the still forms.

"The murdering devils!" the newcomer gasped. "I'm sorry for you, old man. I'll go and bring the boys along. We got them together last night as soon as you left, and came along as hard as we could travel, and now they are waiting at the fence back there. Sent me ahead to scout, because we didn't know whether you hadn't been killed too, and we'd find the niggers in possession. We're with you in this affair, Drummond, and when the boys know just what's what, there'll surely be a few blacks less round these parts!"

Leaving the constable, Fraser disappeared in the direction of the gate through which Drummond had ridden in the night, and a few minutes later half a dozen men came up at the gallop.

"Tell you what, boys," said Fraser, as the party sat over a "billy" of tea and shared the contents of their tucker-bags with the trooper, "there's only one thing for it here. We're goin' to teach these nigs a lesson they won't forget in a hurry. They've been pretty fresh lately, and it's just about time they were shaken up. This affair is the finisher, and if we don't root out this murderin' mob, why, they'll shift us out of the district."

"That's talkin', now," Bill Noblett put in; "we don't quit on this job; we're with poor old Drummond here."

"No," the latter cried, "none of your 'dispersing' on my account! I'm good friends with the blacks round here, and have never had any trouble with 'em. There's one man only I want for this, and he's mine, I tell you, mine! And I'm going to get him, if I have to chase him from here to the border and back! That black swine, Wandy—he's behind all this. The other nigs have only done what he told 'em. You boys want to shoot up the whole tribe, and that means innocent women and kids too. What shootin' there is, is mine. And besides, you'll only have trouble with the authorities, because they'll want everything done in proper form, and I'm not going to drag you into this for my sake. I'll get the man I want, and I'll get him alone!"

The other men protested, but the trooper was adamant. He knew what "dispersing" a tribe meant, and he also knew what a protest had been raised against such wholesale revenge taken by outraged settlers in the back-blocks of the blacks. As a police officer he was well aware that certain formalities would have to be gone through before the law would overtake the ringleader of the blacks who had murdered his brother, and he was not disposed to wait to observe them, but he objected to dragging the other men into what he now regarded as his own case for private satisfaction.

SO THE council of war ended with the men agreeing to take the bodies into the nearest settlement for burial, while Drummond rode off on his quest for the murderers. The trooper quickly picked up the tracks of the blacks, following with particular interest the hoof-prints of a solitary horse, his brother's animal, which he rightly guessed was now bearing the triumphant Wandy. That night he camped at a native well on the edge of the

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sand-plain, and slept soundly till the magpies called him at daybreak.

Whistling up his horse, which had wandered in its search for food, Drummond saddled up and carefully filled his waterbag from the stagnant pool, preparatory to entering the waterless tract of country that seemed to stretch away to eternity in an interminable waste of sand-dune and stunted blue bush.

Somewhere in that barren strip of country which lay practically north and south, Drummond knew he would overtake the natives hurrying toward the South Australian border as fast as they could travel from the pursuit which they knew would be started. He almost hoped that the more civilized leader of the tribe would leave the party and make back to the hospitable country, but if not, then the white man must follow, and if his horse fell and died for want of water, a possibility which was imminent, there was at least the satisfaction of knowing that no horse could carry his quarry through that waterless waste.

In that case, pursuer and pursued would be on an equality, and where the black might lead, the bushman would follow, even if he had to traverse the entire continent. If the black remained with the tribe, Drummond must soon catch up with him, and the battle would be short.

With this reflection, the trooper mounted and rode grimly on, the scorching sun rising a vivid blood-red out of a rock-crested ridge some mile or two ahead, forming the only break in the monotonous sea of sand billows. As the white man cantered easily along, his eyes carefully scanning the country ahead for signs of the retreating blacks, he caught the glint of the sun on something bright.

Immediately his attention was keenly focused on the shoulder of the rugged outcrop now close at hand. As he rode cautiously up, a naked form sprang from behind a rock and fled like a deer, making for a cluster of bushes at the back of the ridge. Like a flash, Drummond raised his rifle and fired, but the shot went wild, and setting spurs to his horse, he galloped after the flying buck.

To reduce the distance between them from five hundred to one hundred yards was but a matter of moments, and seeing himself overtaken, the native halted, fitted a spear to his *wommera*,* and, with weapon poised, awaited the white man. The latter saw his peril, reined his horse to a standstill, and bringing his rifle to the shoulder took careful aim at his opponent's spear arm. With a yell the black fellow dropped his weapon, turned and fled again, but the mounted man was too quick for him, and, as he rode past, the butt of the Winchester made contact with the thick skull, and the black dropped like a poled ox.

Wheeling round in the space of a few yards, Drummond flung himself from his horse and, seeing the black struggling to his feet, seized and held him in a grip of steel. To kill a black by a blow on the head with a light carbine is almost an impossibility, and it was furthest from the thoughts of Drummond, who was anxious to question the native.

Acting the Good Samaritan, the trooper gave his captive a drink, and, addressing him in the native tongue, told him he would not be harmed if he spoke the truth. The black, thoroughly cowed by his rough handling in the brief encounter with the white man, proved anxious to talk, and in "pidgin" English told Drummond that he belonged to the Gidgie tribe, and was in the raid on Doyle's out-station two nights previously.

"Who big boss alonga that fight?" asked the trooper, adopting the vernacular.

"That pfella Wandy bin come alonga camp tellum black fellow plenty tucker, plenty gun, Mardi," the native answered, confirming the white man's suspicion that the renegade had led the attack. Continuing his questioning, he learned the whole details of the affair.

Wandy had set the natives on to raid the camp, had himself clubbed Fred Drummond, and had taken, as his special share of the loot, the overseer's horse and rifle, and was now riding back to the sheep country, having left the tribe that very morning, going in a southerly direction that would take him out of the sand plain. The native explained that he had stayed behind the tribe to watch for pursuers, but before he had left them, a little way ahead of where he was captured, Wandy had ridden off, boasting that he would never be captured.

Drummond waited to hear no more, but taking the native with him, rode on to

**Wommera* is a peculiar stick used to give greater impetus to a spear.

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where the tribe had camped the previous night. Hoof-marks leading from the camp toward the south convinced him that the black had not lied, and that his quarry was well started on his way back to settlement. The trooper precipitately rode off, leaving the astonished black gazing after him.

Then began one of the longest and strangest chases in the history of the great Australian bush. For weeks the policeman trailed his enemy through scrub and desert, over waterless wastes, and through fair pastoral country. The black, by some mysterious means the natives have of communicating over long distances, learned of his pursuer and of his determination, and fear of the white man only sharpened his already acute bush cunning. He doubled on his tracks with tiresome frequency, and having outgrown the native superstitions during his acquaintance with civilization, he traveled long distances by night, always having the advantage of some hours' start, and never hesitating to steal a horse when he wanted a fresh mount.

When occasion demanded, he sought refuge with friendly tribes, or frightened others into giving him cover. On his trail, like Nemesis, Drummond followed, sometimes almost catching up with his quarry, at others losing trace of him for days. The whole bush rang with the story of the man-hunt, and when the gaunt, worn trooper, with his beard matted and his clothes almost in shreds, passed through the little settlements, men shook their heads and spoke of his madness.

When his horse could carry him no more, and the trail led through country in which no horse could find sustenance, Drummond went on foot, and lived like a black fellow, making his meals from snakes, lizards and the succulent white grubs found under the wattle bark. After a time, all trace of both pursuer and pursued was lost. The bush had swallowed them up entirely!

THREE months passed. Out on the frontier of civilization a little party of white men were paving the way for the settlers, ever pushing out and conquering the wilderness. They had marked a route for the drovers to follow with their big herds of cattle, and, at the farthest point of their advance into the bush, were sinking a well to supply themselves and those who would follow with an abundant supply of water.

The sun rode directly overhead in a fleckless sky. Out from the rough bough shelter designated by courtesy "the kitchen," stepped the camp cook, and, vigorously pounding on an empty pan, sounded with the one operation high noon and dinner. The men, sweating with pick and drill on the hard rock, heard the welcome sound, and dropping their tools, hurried to the table erected between two shady trees.

As they seated themselves, a cry broke the silence of the bush, and into the clearing burst a savage, running like a deer, shouting as he sped toward the party, "*Minyah! minyah!*" [save me.]

Racing at his top speed, he was halfway across the open, his long hair flying and his arms outstretched, when a rifle-shot rang out. The black leaped, pitched forward, and fell face down, with a bullet in his brain.

As the watchers stood spellbound at the suddenness of the tragedy enacted before their eyes, out from the thicket, smoking rifle still in hand, stepped another wild figure, scarcely distinguishable from the fallen savage, and advanced with a run to the twitching form on the ground. Roughly he pulled the dead man over, and a smile puckered his face as he looked up at the men who had gathered round.

"He killed my brother, and now we're even!" he said in a hoarse voice, as if answering the questions the bystanders were about to ask.

"Jack Drummond!" one of them cried, "Mad Jack Drummond, by——!"

"Yes, mates, Jack Drummond—'Mad Jack Drummond,' if you like." The wild unkempt being spoke in a strange voice, as though his powers of speech had just been found. "That ends my little job," he added as he touched the dead native with his toe; "I got him at last. Now I'll eat decent food, mates, if you give me a meal."

A WEEK after the events related above, John Drummond appeared once more at Burke's shanty, walking in on the astonished saloon-keeper without a word of warning.

"Holy Mary, it's Johnny Drummond!" cried Tim. "Is it back from the grave ye are, a livin' skiliton? An' ye got the murtherin' black swine? Have a drink, man,

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and lave us have the whole story. It's most did ye must be, wid niver a drop o' good liquor on yer whistle all these weeks past."

Drummond quietly told his story of the long and desperate chase after the man who had slain his brother, and at the conclusion of the narrative asked Tim for the news of civilization.

"News, Johnny, me bhoy? It's bad news fer ye. They've kicked ye out o' the foorce for bein' absint widout lave, and it's back to the bush ye have to go for killin' the nig agin the law."

"Well, I didn't expect they'd keep me on the pay-sheet, Tim, but you don't tell me I'm outlawed?"

"Ye are, John, an' I'm supposed to ayther shoot ye on sight or seize ye an' turn ye over to the law, becaz ye killed a black divil widout a warrant. Ye ought to know the law on it, an' it's the truth I'm tellin' ye. Ye're an outlaw, but don't ye worry about that. Ye've only got to hide yerself till the rampage is over, and thin we'll get ye clear somehow."

With a groan, Drummond buried his head on his arms. Regardless of all consequences and what he knew must be the penalty for taking the law into his own hands, he had killed a native. Those who lived in the bush and knew the circumstances would hold him justified in what he had done, but not so the people in the city, and especially the authorities, whose determination to suppress private vengeance on the natives had led to the proclamation of outlawry against such men as Drummond.

There in the bush, among friends, he was safe, but he could not venture among strangers, any one of whom for the sake of reward or notoriety might betray him. And to take refuge with his friends would only expose them to trouble. There was nothing for it but to take to the bush again, and live like a savage while the hunt for him was hot. Perhaps in time his friends might succeed in removing the ban which made him an outcast whose life was forfeit. If not, then he would take his chance of escaping from the country when the affair was half forgotten.

"Tim," he said, suddenly raising his head, "I'm going back to the bush. I've done no wrong, but down there they don't understand bush law. They sit in comfortable offices and live easy lives, and what do they know about us back here? Their city laws won't work here. You know that, Tim. I tried to believe they would when I had to carry them out, but when it came to my own case it was a different thing. A man who don't fight for himself out here, and waits for the law to settle his troubles, goes down. Now I'm up against it, and I'm going to get out. I'll come back when the coast is clear."

Burke's entreaties to Drummond to stay with his friends and hide close handy were futile, and an hour later the outcast rode off into the bush, not ten minutes in advance of a posse of police who had received word of the ex-trooper's whereabouts, and were hard on his heels. Burke obligingly entertained them for an hour with his opinions of the desperate scoundrel who had stricken terror into the hearts of all peaceful people, and sent them off in the opposite direction to that taken by Drummond.

THE bush seemed to swallow him up completely, and for months his friends neither saw nor heard of him. Throughout the country, police and militia searched vigorously for the outlaw, and several parties even ventured into the wild bush tracts, but Drummond's superior bushcraft enabled him to evade them, and having earned the good will of the natives, or terrorized those who were not kindly disposed, he hid secure from betrayal.

Now and then strange stories floated into the towns of a wild white man leading the native tribes on hunting expeditions, and using a rifle with deadly aim, but there was an entire absence of raids on the white settlers, such as had been frequent before.

Time passed. The search for Drummond was abandoned. His very existence was forgotten, except by a few old bush pioneers, who made periodical trips down to the city and strove hard to have the order of outlawry revoked. At length they were successful in securing a promise that if Drummond would surrender, he would be treated leniently, and through the agency of Burke's shanty, which became a clearing-house of intelligence for the wanderer in the bush, the glad news was sent out in all directions by drovers, prospectors, and natives that John Drummond was free to come back to civilization.

His Excellency the Governor, Sir William Robinson, was seated in his office one

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afternoon in the Spring, when his secretary informed him that a native had called to talk with him. The native was unarmed, and apparently quite safe for a Governor to see.

"Bring him along," said his Excellency, and a tall savage was duly brought into his presence, and, gravely making obeisance, quietly awaited the Governor's command to speak.

"What is it you want of me?" his Excellency said.

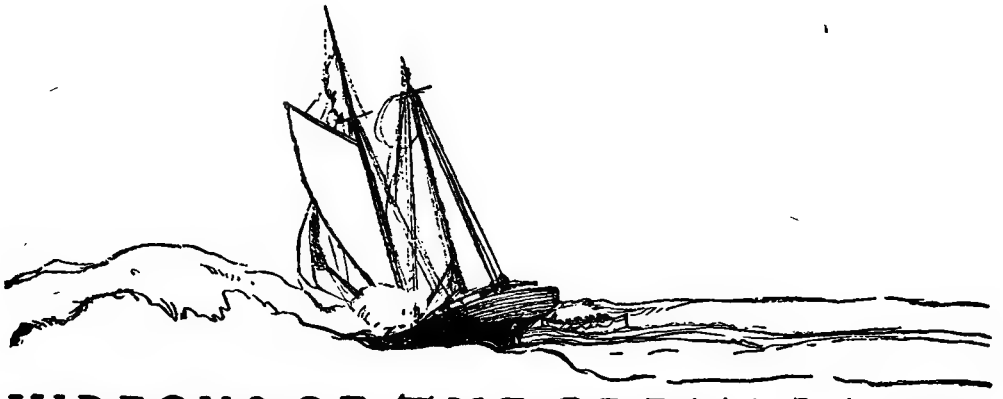
"You tellum people Jacky Drummond come alonga see you?" the native asked in his pidgin English. "You like see him?"

"Well, hardly that," was the reply. "Jacky Drummond can come to the city and leave his case in my hands, though. What do you know about him?"

The native rapidly rubbed his hands over his face, looked straight in the Governor's eyes and said,

"Your Excellency, I am John Drummond, at your command."

"The devil you are! Then, John Drummond, thank your good friends and my respect for a brave man for a pardon as early as it can be granted you."



WRECKS OF THE GREAT LAKES

HEROIC BATTLES OF THE LIFE-SAVING SERVICE

by PERCY M. CUSHING

GRIM as have been the struggles waged against storm and wreck by the life-saving crews along the seaboard of the United States, heroic as their self-sacrifice, indomitable as their fortitude, it is probable that they have never faced situations which called more for hearts of iron and nerves of steel than those which have been met during the last twenty-five years by the live-savers who patrol the shores of the Great Lakes.

There are certain things about these shores that make wrecks upon them peculiarly dreadful. On the sandy bars of the ocean coasts, there is a chance for a vessel; but on the lakes, much of the coast is of abrupt granite cliffs and ragged reefs that cut through the iron hull of a ship like a knife through paper. When an ill-fated vessel strikes, she goes to pieces in a jiffy—is ground to fragments by the teeth of the rock, and her remnants come to land as kindling-wood soon afterward. Lives are lost quickly on these shores.

ON THE SHORES OF LAKE MICHIGAN

SOME of the most frightful wrecks of history are claimed by the Great Lakes and one of the most terrible, though it involved the loss of but a single life, was that of the schooner *J. H. Hartzell* near the harbor of Frankfort, Lake Michigan, on the sixteenth of October, 1880.

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The schooner hailed from Detroit. On board of her were seven men and a woman—the cook. Her skipper's name was William A. Jones. The crew were Mark Mahan, John Cassidy, William Hyde, George Hyde, Edward Biddlecomb and Charles Coursie. The name of the cook was Lydia Dale.

It was Saturday morning. Two hours yet remained before daylight. The vessel was off Frankfort. She might have run into harbor then, but Captain Wilson decided to wait. It would be daylight soon, and there would be less chance of running afoul of other shipping.

When Wilson made his decision, the weather was serene. A comfortable westerly wind was blowing. One hour later a terrific gale was sweeping in on the lee shore, whirling across the lake, and lashing in a fury against the precipitous bluffs and crags of the coast line. In its teeth were sleet and snow.

The *Hartzell* had been caught close inshore. She was two miles south of the harbor. Abeam of her were ragged bluffs, two hundred feet high. Captain Wilson tried to claw off shore, but failed. Then he let go both anchors, which raked bottom, but did not hold. And his vessel began to drift in to her doom.

She struck. Seas combed her fore and aft, and she foundered a few hundred yards from shore. The scene aboard of her was appalling. Captain Wilson had been ill with fever. The cook, Lydia Dale, had also been ill. She was weak and feeble. The crew took to the foremast cross-trees, nailed planks across them, and took the woman up. She was unable to hold fast, so they laid her on the planks and lashed her there. The vessel began to break up. Both aftermasts went. The foremast, with its wretched human freight, loosened in the steps, and swayed, groaning, as the vessel rolled to the surf and gale.

The imagination of the painter of the wildest wreck scenes would have fallen short of the actual picture which now met the eyes of the residents of Frankfort as they looked down the precipitous bluffs at the foot of which the storm was thundering. In the foremast rigging, lashed to the ratlines twelve feet from the foaming deck of the schooner, was Captain Wilson. Forty feet above him, in the cross-trees, were the others of the crew. The Life-Saving Report of the year contains the following striking description of the scene:

"Standing in the spreading ladders of the lower rigging, a few feet above the water, was a diminished figure with upturned face, watching the people on the summit of the bluff. This was the Captain. The monstrous waves curled and broke below his feet, and covered him with their spray. Forty feet above him could be seen, lessened by distance, a huddle of faces, peering at the crowd on shore from the swaying cross-trees. These were the faces of the crew. The foretop-mast rose above them, and the gaff-topsail, partially unfurled, bulged and flapped over them in the tempest. This frightful spectacle, seen by the crowd on the heights through the weird curtain of the tempest, amidst the uproar of the wind and sea, had something of the vivid unreality of a vision. . . .

"Amidst all the din of gale and sea, the unhappy men could hear the harsh creaking of the mast as the vessel swayed to and fro. They expected every moment to go over. The poor woman lay among them in the narrow space the elevation afforded, her lower limbs swathed in a weft of canvas which one of the men, Edward Biddlecomb, had cut out of the gaff-topsail above and roped around them as they hung down through the orifice in the deck of the cross-trees; her head rested on the knees of the sailor, William Hyde, who kept her face covered from the storm. She had become very cold and numb, and from time to time the men nearest her chafed her hands and arms in the effort to revive her. She gave no heed to these attentions. The delirium which the sailors say marked her first hour aloft, had yielded to unconsciousness."

THE STRUGGLE ASHORE

MEANTIME, while these tragic incidents were being enacted on board the unfortunate vessel, the iron courage and fortitude of a hardy lake-coast town was battling heroically against enormous odds on shore. The wreck of the schooner had been discovered soon after she struck. In a short time, a dozen residents of the village of South Frankfort were on the bluff looking down on the stranded craft, and building a bonfire.

The nearest life-saving station was at Point au Bec Scies, ten miles distant.

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A man started through the storm on horseback to sound the alarm to the life-savers. The next thing was to let the crew of the *Hartzell* know that aid was on the way. Some one in the crowd hit on an idea. Heavy sticks of driftwood were hastily gathered and laid along the white face of the bluff in such a way as to spell the words: "Life-boat coming." The sailors in the cross-trees of the schooner signaled back that they understood.

It was just eight-thirty when the messenger staggered up to the Point au Bec Scies station. Five minutes later the life-saving crew were bucking the storm southward to the scene of the disaster. And they were facing a herculean task.

The station was on the shore of the lake. Between it and the beach south of Frankfort, where the wreck lay, was a river mouth which flared westward into the teeth of the tempest. From the entrance to this river, tall spile piers jutted into the lake, making it impossible for a beach-cart moving along the shoreline to pass them. Therefore it was necessary for the life-saving crew to take an inland road, a circuitous and long route at the best.

To add to the difficulty, the only road accessible was a poor one, sand choked, grass grown, and leading through heavy woods back of the town. To reach the road, it was necessary first to take a two-mile stretch of half-broken trail, filled with stumps and trees, and winding up and down soggy sandhills.

Half an hour found the crew with nine miles of the journey yet before them. The cumbersome beach-cart could be moved forward only a few yards at a time, and then only by the combined effort of all the men. Often it overturned and had to be repacked. At times it jammed in the débris that cluttered the trail, and minutes were lost extricating it.

The life-savers held manfully to their task, while the bitter cold clutched through their clothes, and the tempest howled about them. The horse which had started with the cart gave out after two miles, and was left behind, the men struggling along with the thousand-pound cart themselves. At last the half-broken trail was conquered, the main road was reached, and help arrived. Two extra horses from town reached the scene and were hitched to the cart.

THE rescue party plodded on, occasionally joined by fresh citizens from town, and fresh horses. At one o'clock, the crew were opposite the beach where the wreck lay, but they were a mile inland, and a dense wilderness separated them from the shore. At this point a man in the crowd that had now gathered, volunteered to show them a short cut through to the beach. With the cart, the men followed him, only to find themselves suddenly at the end of the trail, with a dense wall of forest, stump strewn and brush grown, before them.

To add to the trouble, the last stretch of the journey was up a precipitous side hill. So steep was the hill, that it was necessary for the men to climb, using roots and crevices for foothold. For a moment it looked as though hope of proceeding farther was gone; but in that instant one of those bursts of desperate determination that characterize strong men when action is imperative, flashed up among the crowd which had been growing as the goal drew near. Suddenly a crowd of men and women, armed with axes and crowbars, rushed from houses near by and began to clear away a trail through the wilderness.

"The road to the beach—clear the road to the beach!"

The cry rang through the section, and the sturdy townsfolk answered, running with all sorts of implements to the scene. Stumps were uprooted, logs rolled away, brush leveled in no time, and then four horses and thirty men dragged the cart to the top of the hill. It was then seen that the chief difficulty still lay ahead. The flat face of a thick timber belt confronted the crowd. Of what happened then, the Life-Saving chronicles say:

"The obstacle seemed to inspire all present with a sudden electric energy. . . . In an instant, and as by a simultaneous impulse, all hands, citizens and crew, flung themselves upon the wood with axes and handspikes, and a work began which resembled a combat. The hilltop resounded with the blows of the implements, the heavy thuds of fallen timber lifted and flung aside, and the shouts of the brigade of pioneers mingled with the howling of the wind and the hissing of the descending hail and rain.

"The wood seemed tumbling asunder, and its rapidly opening depths were alive with rude figures in every variety of fiery

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action. In some places, men were showering terrible blows with axes upon standing timber. In others, they were prying and lifting aside great fallen trees with all their branches, shouting in chorus. Groups here and there, with frantic activity, were uprooting and rending away masses of brush and undergrowth.

"Sometimes, ten men would fling themselves in a mass upon a young tree or a sapling, pull it down and tear it away in an instant. In an incredibly short space of time the way through the wood was cleared, and the mortar-cart loaded with apparatus was dragged forward to the brow of the hill."

SHOOTING THE LINE

THE first half of the battle was won. Keeper Matthews shot a line aboard the *Hartzell*, which was secured by the sailors in the fore rigging.

Then began a desperate effort to haul out the whip-line—an effort which lasted two hours while fifty men held one end on the shore, and the half frozen sailors in the cross-trees gained inch by inch against the set of the current, which caught the middle of the line and dragged it powerfully to leeward.

At last the whip was out, and then another obstacle leaped to the fore. That is one of the most terrible features of the work of wreck rescue—the cumulative hardship of new and unexpected difficulties that arise invariably when success seems certain. In this case the trouble was with the two lines that now led from shore to ship. Carried by the strain of the current, they had become wrapped around each other a dozen times, making it impossible for the breeches-buoy to be hauled out on them.

For a moment, the crowd on the bald, storm-swept bluff stared with blank faces, the sense of disaster strong in their hearts. In the next, Keeper Matthews had gripped the situation by the throat. He had one line fastened to a tree, and got a force of men on the other, heaving it over the standing line whenever the tangled length swung free of the surf.

When, after half an hour's work, the two lines were almost free, an uprooted tree drifted down upon them, fouling them worse than ever, and the life-savers and the townspeople on shore were obliged to perform the laborious task all over again.

It was then afternoon. The hurricane still held, and the single standing mast of the wreck swayed back and forth with a play of six feet at every roll. It was patent that it would soon fall, and the rescue party worked heroically to effect the rescue before the dreaded moment arrived.

The breeches-buoy was bent on to the line, and with fifty men holding the hawser on the abrupt face of the cliff (there was no place where an anchor could be sunk), the life-savers began hauling out the apparatus that would establish a train of escape to the shipwrecked crew. When the buoy was almost out, it was found that the tree to which the whip-line had been fastened was being torn from its roots, and another body of men was obliged to hold it.

So great was the strain on the lines that the men lay flat on their backs on the side of the cliff, their bodies curving up over its top in an arc, with their feet braced against roots and ledges, straining their hearts out in the desperate task. Each knew that should they be unable to hold the lines, all the work that had gone before would be for naught, and each held on like grim death.

THE buoy reached the ship, but so thick was the weather, with driving gusts of sleet and snow, that those on shore could not see what was going on in the cross-trees of the *Hartzell*. The life-savers waited what they believed to be a reasonable length of time, then began to haul in the buoy. This was a terrible task.

With half the town of Frankfort hauling on the line, it took seventeen minutes by actual timing to get the buoy ashore. Twice the lines fouled, and Keeper Matthews and his men leaped waist deep into the freezing surf to free them. When the buoy hove in sight from the murk of the storm, it was seen to contain a man. It was the mate, John Cassidy. He was unconscious.

No time was lost preparing for the next rescue. By this time the mast of the *Hartzell* was swaying so badly that Keeper Matthews decided to send off the life-car in place of the buoy, as the big metal canister would hold three persons, while the breeches could accommodate but one.

Twice on the outward journey, the car was upset, but righted again, and just as it reached the vessel, the jagged mainmast,

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which had fallen, but held by the rigging, still lay alongside the wreck, lifted on a giant wave and crashed down upon the car, hurling it twenty feet into the air. For an instant it was thought that it had been stove in, and a great shout of despair went up from ashore. But the car was uninjured.

Without delay, two of the men in the cross-trees descended to the car, and were hauled ashore. They were William Hyde and Edward Biddlecomb. As the car was almost in, the side of the cliff, under the weight of the crowd, suddenly caved in, and twenty men were thrown into the surf amidst a landslide of rocks and earth. In some miraculous manner all escaped injury and got ashore, still clutching the line to which for over two hours now they had clung desperately, the blood from their hands staining it red.

"WHERE'S THE WOMAN?"

INSTANTLY the task of hauling in the life-car was completed, and the men within it liberated. Suddenly the crowd seemed to remember the woman. Where was she? Why had she not been sent ashore? The questions were anxious, eager. The rescued sailors said she was coming the next trip.

Again the car went out, and reappeared from the murk with the Captain and another sailor. But the woman was not there. Where was she? The Captain said she was nearly dead. Her body would be brought off with the last load. Sullenly, the rescuers hurried out the life-car again, for there was growing anger in their hearts that the sick cook should have been left lying in the cross-trees when the men were coming ashore. The reports of the Service say of the final act in the grim tragedy of that wild October day:

"The common consciousness that the woman was at last coming in the car with the remainder of the men on the wreck, and that the tremendous hardship and effort of many hours were about to bear full fruit, gave a furious alertness to the cordons of obscure figures on the ghostly front of the bluff, and the rope of the life-car slid swiftly through the darkness.

"The night had fairly set in on this sustained labor, when the life-car was seen emerging from the gloom over the riot of the breakers. It had made the trip bottom-up, and presently grounded in this position on the edge of the shore. The voice of the Keeper at once rang out to those around him:

"'Now, boys, jump down and roll that car over and get that woman out as soon as you can!'

"A dozen men rushed down the slope, waist-deep into the surf, and lugged the car up out of the swash and floodwood. In a moment it was rolled over, and the hatch snatched off. A man instantly sprang out quite nimbly. It was the sailor, George Hyde. Another figure, stiff and halting, rose in the opening, and was helped from the car. This was the other sailor, Charles Coursie. A cry of many voices then rose, 'Where's the woman?'

"It was followed by a momentary silence, in which men were seen bent over the open hatch and groping about with their arms inside the car. Then some one shouted to the crowd in a terrible voice, 'They haven't brought the woman!' The announcement was received with a savage burst of imprecations. The dark air resounded with a roar of curses, and amidst the din, men were heard yelling that they never would have laid hands to the hauling-lines if they had known that the woman was to be left upon the wreck to perish."

The body of Lydia Dale, the cook, came ashore of its own accord seventeen days later. At the inquest, the coroner returned the significant verdict that she had met death by drowning.

She could not have drowned while she lay in the cross-trees of the ill-fated *Hartzell*.

AN ILL-FATED SIGNAL

A KINK in a flag halyard sent three of the crew of the Grand Point au Sable Life-Saving Station to a tragic death on the twenty-ninth of November, 1886. It was one of those occasions when fate made toys of men, played with them heartlessly, as a cat plays with a mouse, and then crushed out their lives.

The weather had been squally for a week —squally with those quick Winter squalls that burst fiercely out of the Winter distances along the Lakes, striking terror to the hearts of sailors, and strewing the rugged shores with wreckage and dead men. All night of the twenty-eighth, Keeper Flynn of the Grand Point au Sable station had

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been in the lookout tower, searching out into the scud and darkness lakeward for signs of trouble.

It was six o'clock in the morning. The last patrols of the night were on their way back to the station from north and south. The rest of the crew were snoring in their bunks below. Keeper Flynn rose from his seat, dropped his marine glasses into the leather case, and had turned toward the companion-ladder leading from the look-out, when suddenly he caught sight of something that stopped him short. Northward of the station about a mile, close in to the beetling head of land that hooked out into the stormy lake, and about two miles off the station, a large schooner, reefed close, hove into view.

The Keeper's glasses leaped again from their leather holster, and the next minute he was scrambling down the companion-ladder, shouting to his crew to turn out, for in the main rigging of the vessel was a flag at half-mast, the signal of distress.

The schooner was still staggering on her course across the deep scoop of the harbor, when the life-savers launched their boat and started out over the storm-swept lake to her aid. Half a mile was gained by heroic work at the oars, when the bowman, glancing over his shoulder, noted that the distress flag which all had seen flying when they set out, had been hoisted full mast. Instantly he spoke to the man next to him:

"She is all right; she is holding on her course, and her flag has been run up."

But the wind snatched the words away, and Keeper Flynn at the steering-oar in the stern did not hear. It would have been insubordinate for the men to speak to him about what they had seen, and he kept the surf-boat on her way, evidently not noticing the change himself.

THE BATTLE WITH THE SEAS

A FEW moments later the outer bar of the harbor was reached, and a giant comber, catching the bow of the life-boat, whirled her around and capsized her. The crew were tossed out like toothpicks, but all seized the life-lines along the sides of the craft, except surfman John Smith who was caught under the overturned boat, coming up beneath her, his head in the air space between her flooring and the surface of the water. He was instantly missed by his companions, and in answer to their shouts, he called from under the boat that he was all right and had plenty of air.

In the events of the next hour he was forgotten by the remainder of the crew. He was next seen hours later, when a wave righted the boat, and his body floated out. The face was puffy and mottled. He had died of suffocation when the air gave out.

At the time of the capsize, the boat with her crew, one under her, two up on her bottom, and four hanging to the lines along her side, was nearly a mile from shore, heavy seas breaking over her, and the ice crusting her after every wave, for the thermometer stood at zero.

The wind and the current were moving parallel to the shore, and there was nothing to facilitate the progress of the boat toward the beach but the lift of the sea. An hour passed, and the seven men began slowly to freeze to death, when a broken oar drifted near, and was secured by one of the crew. Taking turns laboring with it, the men succeeded finally in driving the boat into shoal water, where they could touch bottom. One of them then swam ashore, and for a moment it looked as though all would land safely.

A short way ahead of them the piers of the harbor shoot straight out into the lake. These piers were on that day solid masses of ice, and where the current backed up against them, they deflected it out again into the lake. Caught in this eddy, the capsized life-boat swung swiftly away from the shoal water and out toward the open lake.

Dismay gripped the hardy fellows, heightened the next instant when they saw that the current was carrying them directly down upon the next and longer pier, against which the waves leaped and dashed in a foaming maelstrom. If they came within the clutch of those shattering tons of water they would be dashed to pieces in a trice.

But at this point, Fate, after its fashion, began to toy with them, when every moment was agony. The current setting out from between the two piers, carried them safely around the end of the last pier, and sucked them again into shallow water beyond it and near the shore. The water was comparatively smooth, and the beach but a hundred yards distant.

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With a line around his waist, Keeper Flynn plunged forward in an attempt to carry the rope to shore and haul his comrades after him. A dozen strokes in the icy water sucked from him what strength he still retained, and he was hauled back to the boat exhausted.

"No use," he gasped.

It was the last word his men heard him speak.

The other men then endeavored to push the boat closer to the beach with the broken oar. Suddenly it stuck fast in the mud, and their hands were so benumbed that they could not hold on to it, and had to endure the agony of seeing the boat drift slowly away from it.

THERE was now but one thing to do. Another few minutes on the boat would have meant death from freezing. Three of the men swam for shore and reached it. Keeper Flynn started a short distance behind them. He swam a few strokes, stood up in the water, which was hardly to his waist, staggered blindly forward, and fell. He was struggling feebly to rise, when an incoming wave knocked him down again. Though the water was then only to his knees, he could not regain his feet.

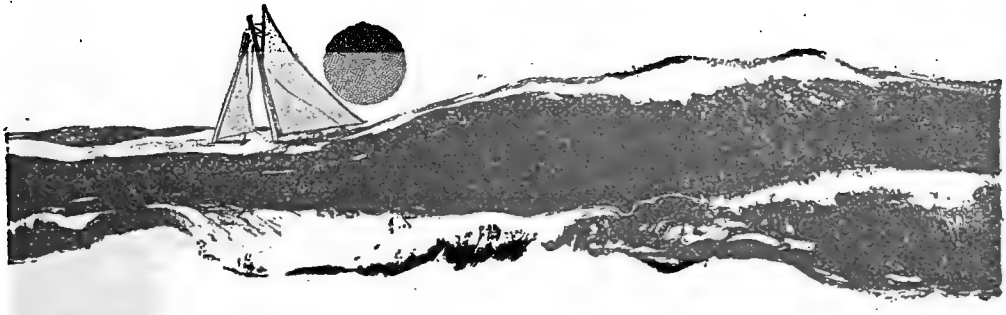
The three men who had just reached the shore, themselves in desperate plight, sheathed in ice from head to foot, hands and feet frozen, saw the keeper fall, and started out through the surf after him. One of the men, stronger than the rest, reached him first, struggled to lift him to his feet, but, failing, could do nothing save hold his head above water, until the others, falling repeatedly, tottering like drunken men, clutched him and dragged him to the beach. He was dead.

Meanwhile, the last surfman, Oren Hatch, still remained on the boat. The three frozen men who had dragged the body of the Keeper to shore had no means of reaching this man. They were so exhausted themselves that they could hardly stand.

Lumps of ice were frozen to their flesh. Their arms hung stiff and useless beside them. They could hardly lift their frozen feet. Yet they made the attempt to rescue their comrade—an act which, under the circumstances, shows the stuff of which the watchers of the coasts are made. Struggling through the incoming surf, stumbling and falling face downward in the breakers repeatedly, aiding each other to rise, they almost reached the capsized boat, when it was washed beyond their grasp. Three times they staggered forward, and at last were washed helpless ashore, where a moment later they were found by rescuers, and were taken to a farmhouse and resuscitated.

Hatch was finally brought to shore, but he was dead.

The next day, the mistake which had cost the lives of those three life-savers was discovered. The schooner to whose aid they had gone had not been in distress. Her captain had tried to hoist a signal for a tug, but the flag halyard jammed when the flag was half way up the mast. Before the tangle could be cleared, the crew of the Grand Point au Sable station were on their futile and fatal errand. Captain Flynn had seen a flag at half mast—a signal which no keeper in the service can disregard.



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THE LUCKY BAG

AN EPISODE IN THE CAREER of A GENTLEMAN of FORTUNE

by MAX RITTENBERG

"CHERI, did you notice that diamond necklace Mrs. Eames is wearing to-night?" asked Renie of her husband as they stood alone on the bows of the steam-yacht *Ariadne*, cleaving its way through the stately Adriatic on her summer cruise around the Mediterranean.

"Naturally," returned John Hallard. It was part of his professional work to note such points.

"They are white zircon cut to imitate diamond," added Renie with the certainty of knowledge.

He had married her from behind the counters of a jewelry establishment in the rue de la Paix, and she knew jewels as intimately as a shepherd knows his sheep—recognizing tiny points of difference that are non-existent to the casual eye of the outsider.

"The sparkle is a fine imitation of rose diamond, but the cutting angles are different," she pursued. "Poirier of Paris does that kind of thing to perfection—probably they come from him."

"How could one distinguish?"

"Zircon won't scratch diamond, chéri."

Hallard was lost in thought for many minutes, and his wife did not interrupt. There was a deep sympathy between them that made explanations unnecessary. She knew quite well that his keen brain was seeking for some scheme whereby to turn her information to account.

They had taken this Mediterranean cruise on the *Ariadne* for strictly professional reasons. The yacht always carries a considerable number of wealthy passengers, and where wealth is focused there opportunities exist for the man whose wits are his livelihood. Hallard always frequented money.

On board ship strangers are thrown into especially close contact, and acquaintanceships can be made with ease. All this was promising, but so far John Hallard had found no opening. From England to Gib., to Malta, to Venice, had been the course, and though a fortnight had elapsed and friendly relations between the passengers were in full swing, no opportunity worth the taking had shown itself.

On the passenger list they were, of course, entered as Sir Ralph and Lady Kenrick, their self-made titles at that period of their adventurous career. Laroche, Hallard's very devoted manservant, was not with him, being busily engaged on the Riviera laying out preparations for the undoing of Monsieur Octave Bourdion, banker, of Monte Carlo. Renie had no maid

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in her service. She wisely distrusted maids.

"Mrs. Eames doesn't look the kind of woman to wear imitation jewelry if she knew it," mused Hallard, half to himself. "There's something peculiar behind. . . . . Fishy. . . . . Who is she?"

"I'm told she was the Hon. Vivien Lennersley, a society beauty and an heiress. Eames was the dashing young Guardsman when he married her. Now——"

"Whisky," was Hallard's curt summing of the situation. The man's bloated, sodden face stood out in his mental vision—the wreck of a once floridly handsome soldier. "And he thinks he can play cards."

II

THE chief duty of a ship's purser is, of course, to be a social M. C. This is especially so on such a boat as the *Ariadne*, which carries no other cargo than pleasure-seekers. Geoffrey Wilmer had been chosen for his post by the owners of the *Ariadne*, because he had pleasant, easy manners; could talk pleasantly with bores and cranks as well as with pretty women; could play cards, quoits, and so on in a pleasant, well-bred way.

Hallard began his investigation in indirect fashion by cultivating Geoffrey Wilmer. There was little difficulty for such a man as Hallard in getting on very friendly, intimate terms with this easy-going, somewhat ingenuous young fellow. Soon he had obtained several valuable pointers regarding the Hon. Mrs. Eames, Major Eames and others of the ship's party. Particularly was he interested in Count Ratislaw, an Austrian who had come on board at Malta and who occupied a cabin opposite to his own. The Count was with the Eameses, and had evidently known them for some time. He was a man of thirty-five to forty, with an extraordinary silky smoothness of manner and appearance that was too impeccable to be pleasant.

As Hallard remarked to the young purser: "He's the sort of man you would find at the end of a three-day railway journey with impeccably-creased trousers, impeccably-sleeked hair and impeccably-creamed complexion."

Wilmer laughed boyishly. "That hits him off all right. But he's good company—plays a rattling good game of cards and all that sort of thing."

"Too good."

"Why?"

Hallard led him to one of the port-holes of the smoking-room. Inside, at one of the tables in the corner, Count Ratislaw and Major Eames were playing piquet—the latter flushed with whisky although it was early in the afternoon, and every now and again swearing viciously at the cursed luck of the cards.

Hallard looked at the young purser significantly.

Said the latter apologetically: "Well, it's none of my business, you know. I can't interfere in that sort of thing."

"Together we can," said Hallard in a low voice.

"How?"

"Butt in. Protect him from himself. Come with me and follow my lead."

They sat down by the piquet table and watched the hands in silence for some time. At the end of a game, Hallard suggested with a pleasant assurance that carried no suggestion of intrusion that they should make up a four at bridge. The Major agreed—piquet had gone badly for him, and he was glad of a change of occupation suggested from outside. Count Ratislaw agreed with silky politeness.

"The usual shilling points, ees eet not?" he asked as he riffled the cards with wonderful smoothness.

"Penny points for me," said John Hallard easily.

"Same for me," chimed in Wilmer, following the lead.

Count Ratislaw's voice was still silky, as he replied: "Ees eet worth playing for so leetle?"

"I play the game for the sake of the game," returned John Hallard. "The usual penny points lend quite enough money interest to it. Afterwards, if you want a money gamble, I'll cut cards with you for a thousand pounds a cut."

The Austrian smiled smoothly, but did not take up the challenge. Instead, he turned to Major Eames with a peculiar penetration of look.

The latter squirmed uncomfortably. Clearly there was a struggle going on in his mind. He was like a bird fascinated by the snake—drawn to it in spite of himself. In his hand was the second pack of cards, and he gripped and ungripped them nervously.

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Suddenly he pushed back his chair and snarled out with the sodden voice of the drunkard: "The Count's right! That's a measly game. I don't want your cursed interference!" And he flung the pack on the table and lurched out of the room.

John Hallard made no reply. His mind was racing over the possible explanations of this snake and bird situation. Was there, underlying it, some opportunity for himself?

This Count Ratislaw made a fine opponent for a battle of wits. He began to tingle with the zest of a coming fight.

THEREAFTER, Hallard and his wife kept shrewd watch upon the Eames party. The Count seemed to dog the footsteps of Mrs. Eames beyond even the customary freedom of shipboard life, but how far the Major was aware of it it was impossible to say. Most of the waking hours of Major Eames were spent at the card tables or by the smoking-room bar, and of an evening he would often disappear mysteriously to his cabin and not be seen again until late the next morning.

A strong believer in intuitive perceptions, John Hallard felt most strongly that under this situation lay some big opportunity for himself, though it would have been difficult to give cold-blooded reasons for his belief. There could be no making of plans—he could only keep shrewd watch, and wait to grip opportunity the moment it should appear above the surface.

And presently, by sheer accident, a flood of light came upon the Eames-Ratislaw situation. One night of rising wind and lurching sea, when the port-holes of every cabin were screwed up tight by orders from the bridge, Hallard on retiring to his cabin found Renie in a blaze of excitement.

In a low tense voice she whispered to him: "The Count has her necklace!"

"But I've just come from Wilmer's cabin —where a few of us have been smoking a last pipe—and I saw him lock away that necklace in the safe. He keeps it for Mrs. Eames when she's not wearing it."

"I saw it in the Count's hands not twenty minutes ago," replied Renie, and explained in detail. As she had passed down the passage to her cabin, she had noticed the door of the cabin opposite on the latch. This is not unusual on board ship in hot latitudes —especially on a night when port-holes are screwed up and a cabin atmosphere is close —but as she passed the door, there came to her through the opening a most startling glimpse of the interior. Reflected from the glass of the shut port-hole backed by a black night of storm, she had seen the Count standing by his dressing-table and running through his hands a splendid diamond necklace.

It was the merest reflected glimpse, but to Renie's trained eye for jewelry there was no doubt as to the identity of the necklace.

"It was hers!"

John Hallard's jaw went square and the light of battle came into his eyes. "By Hector, that's the other one! The real one!"

"Unless——"

"Impossible. I saw the imitation one locked away in safe custody. Ratislaw must have the real one."

"Perhaps he made the exchange without the knowledge of the Eameses?"

Hallard considered for a few moments. "I don't think so," he replied. "I see a much more likely explanation. We know he has been friendly with the Major for some time—knew him while at Malta, and probably before that. The Major must have lost a heap of money to him at cards, and in order to pay up, took his wife's necklace, sent it at the Count's instigation to Paris under pretense of getting it repaired, had an imitation made, and then paid off his debt to Ratislaw with the real one. Yes, that's it! That explains why the Major knuckles under to him—afraid of his telling Mrs. Eames."

"Blackmail," was Renie's contemptuous comment. In all their various adventures they had never stooped to blackmail. In John Hallard's code of honor, with which his wife was in thorough sympathy, blackmail was the coward's game.

He nodded agreement. "Yes, blackmail without a doubt. . . . . Now if we could rescue the Major from the clutches of this silky schemer, we should have a very good case for compensation from the Eameses or their rich relations. As matters stand at present, the Major is being pulled down to perdition."

"Should we get much out of it if you succeed?" asked Renie dubiously.

"It's doubtful, but in any case it's a sporting game. I'll play it for the sake of the game!"

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THE next evening he managed to draw the Major aside into a quiet corner of the deck, and gradually felt his way toward an understanding. Major Eames had drunk himself into the maudlin, self-pitying state, and seemed to have forgotten his violent outburst of a few days back.

"I'm done for, done for!" he complained piteously. "I don't care what happens to me now. Everything's gone against me. Every one's against me. No one has any pity for me."

"Why don't you let me help you?"

"You can't help me. No one can help me."

"The other day I tried to."

"I don't remember."

"When you were playing piquet with Ratislaw."

A shiver went through the Major's frame. "He's a devil! Curse him!" he jerked out.

"Then why not cut free from him?"

"No, I don't mean that. Ratislaw's a good fellow. He's been a good friend to me. I don't know what I'm saying sometimes. I'm done for, done for!"

To deal with such a will-less wreck required all of Hallard's patience.

"You must have lost a lot of money to him over cards," he remarked quietly.

The Major flared up into sudden resentment. "No, I haven't! I can beat him at piquet any day! I've won money from him—look at this I. O. U., if you don't believe me." He fumbled in his pockets and produced an I. O. U. of the Count's for a hundred and fifty pounds.

Hallard gave no sign of astonishment, but this document disturbed him profoundly. It crumpled up all his theory of the Count's hold over the Major. Was it possible that Renie had made a huge mistake? If the necklace in Ratislaw's possession had nothing to do with Major Eames, then all their elaborate deductions went for nothing.

Suppose the Count had himself procured the imitation necklace and exchanged it for the real one!

Hallard rose to leave. "Well, I must be off to join my wife," he said, and then quite casually: "What a splendid necklace that is of Mrs. Eames."

The Major drew himself up with a sudden accession of sodden dignity. "I won't have my wife's affairs discussed! D—— your interference!"

The situation seemed more tangled than ever. Clearly it was useless to tackle it from the Major's side. Maudlin as he was, he would not give his confidence beyond a very limited point. He had called the Count "a devil" with one breath and "a good friend" with the next. Apparently he had not run into debt with Ratislaw over cards, and yet a very harmless compliment about his wife's jewelry had driven him into a ridiculous shell of reserve.

"I must get at the root of it through Ratislaw," said Hallard to his wife in the privacy of their cabin.

"Chéri, he looks dangerous! Take care of yourself."

"Where there's no danger, there's no sport."

"Don't run needless risks. Let's drop this case, and try for something easier."

But when John Hallard had fastened his bulldog teeth into a situation, he was not easily pried loose. Instead of giving up the case, he began to weave a plan of approach to Ratislaw.

The idea that gradually took shape in his mind was this. He would assume that the Count had in his possession the real Eames necklace, since Renie was still positive about its identity. Giving himself out as a keen lover of jewels, he would let Ratislaw know that he was anxious to buy some more and have them made up for his wife's use after the cruise had ended. Then he would mention in a matter-of-course way that he had heard Ratislaw had some fine diamonds to dispose of. On the way in which the Count replied to this would depend his further course of action. One point he had firmly decided upon: not to let matters rest until he knew definitely what was the bond between the Major and the smooth-spoken, crafty Austrian.

With this in view, Hallard continued his friendly footing with the ship's purser. He began to make a habit of dropping into Wilmer's cabin for a good-night pipe before turning into bed. Perhaps the young fellow, who knew every item of ship's gossip, could provide some further pointer which would help him in the big interview he had set himself.

AND indeed, it turned out as he had expected. For one evening, when he and Wilmer were alone in the latter's cabin, and Wilmer was as usual

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clearing up his day's business papers and locking away in the safe those of value, the looked-for information came out in unexpected form.

"Well, we're going to lose our friend Ratislaw."

"Where?" queried Hallard.

"He's just decided to drop off at Constantinople—had a letter or something calling him back to Vienna on urgent affairs."

This made action imperative. They were due to drop anchor in the Golden Horn in twenty-four hours. It was disquieting, and yet a spur to action.

At that moment there came a telephone call for the purser, and Wilmer, after listening at the receiver and assenting briefly, turned to lock up his safe.

"Excuse me for a few moments. The Old Man wants me in his cabin about some supplies. Sha'n't be long if you'll wait and help yourself to baccy."

"Right," answered Hallard from his easy chair.

The young fellow went out of his cabin briskly, humming a tune.

Behind him he left opportunity.

For in the locked safe he had carelessly left his bunch of keys. In a flash there came to Hallard a scheme which was pure inspiration. It threw over all the plans he had weaved so carefully, but that mattered nothing. It meant a mad risk to himself, but that also mattered nothing.

Rapidly he unlocked the safe and searched it for Mrs. Eames's necklace. Within a few moments it lay in his hands, glistening, fascinating, luring—but imitation splendor. He tried it against a diamond sleeve-link of his own, and the zircon would not scratch diamond. Within another few seconds he had hidden it in a flower-vase on Wilmer's desk, locked up the safe again, and returned to his easy chair and the filling of his pipe.

"You left your keys in the safe," said Hallard when the young purser came back to the cabin. "Lucky I was here."

III

AND now to wait for the explosion. If it did not come before they reached Constantinople, but later, then things would look black for Hallard, on whom suspicion must inevitably rest.

No, better to set a match to the powder himself and time it for the right moment. So Hallard said to his wife: "I want you to ask Mrs. Eames if she is going to wear her necklace for dinner. We are due at Constantinople at ten o'clock to-morrow evening, so ask her about six o'clock. Be sure she gets that necklace from the purser's safe. If necessary, make her suspicious of its safety."

"Why?" asked Renie.

"I'm not going to tell you," returned Hallard bluntly. Renie must know nothing about his new-born plan, in case it were to fail and suspicion of theft were to fall upon him. At all costs, Renie must have clean hands in the matter.

She looked at her husband searchingly, and the deep sympathy between them gave her an intuitive feeling of his reason for silence. "I want to share the danger," said she firmly.

"There's no danger," he reassured her. "Remember: six o'clock or a little before. That's vital."

At seven o'clock the next evening, when they entered the narrow strait of the Dardanelles and the tangle of hills, dotted with grim forts, lay golden and purple to each side of them, the explosion came. Hallard, watching from a deck-chair near to the officers' quarters, saw Wilmer rushing white-faced to the captain's cabin. Presently stewards were called to that same cabin one by one. Dressed for dinner, Hallard sat quietly in his deck-chair, waiting for the inevitable summons. The bugler in uniform came his rounds, proclaiming dinner. And then the looked-for summons came.

"The captain's compliments, sir, and would you step to his cabin for a moment?"

Hallard followed the steward and entered the cabin with easy, confident step. The captain, the chief officer and the purser were gathered there—the two former grave and official, the latter white and scared. Captain McIntyre came to his point with the bluntness of the seaman:

"Mrs. Eames's diamond necklace has been stolen from the ship's safe. Mr. Wilmer tells me you were in his cabin late last night. Did you notice anything likely to throw light on the theft?"

Hallard looked over at Wilmer with a friendly smile before answering the captain: "This is no surprise to me."

"Explain yourself, sir."

"If Mr. Wilmer is under any suspicion, I

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can clear him at once. I rather fancy I can lay hands on that necklace."

Wilmer gulped his relief. The other two men scrutinized Hallard keenly, but there was no wavering of his easy self-possession.

"Well, sir?"

"This is a very delicate matter," returned John Hallard. "I have had a glimpse of the necklace, and I can probably get it back for you. Will that be sufficient, or must you have explanations?"

"It's my duty to know the whole facts," said blunt Captain McIntyre.

"It might mean a very disagreeable scandal. Would that be acceptable to the owners of the *Ariadne*?"

The first officer drew his chief aside and whispered earnestly.

The latter appeared to consent grudgingly, and said to Hallard: "Well, Sir Ralph, I'll waive that point. What do you propose to do?"

"Give me to anchor-drop to get you back your necklace."

"No man leaves this ship until the jewelry is found," answered the captain. "I'll expect your report before anchor-drop."

"Be easy on that score. But have I your authority behind me in case of necessity?"

"You have."

"Then reassure Mrs. Eames, and let us all go to dinner as though nothing unusual were on foot."

SHORTLY after dinner, Hallard went to his cabin, and listened at the crack of the door. Presently he seemed to hear some movement he was waiting for, and he went out and rapped briskly at Count Ratislaw's cabin.

"Come in."

Hallard entered with his usual easy self-possession and closed the door quietly behind him. "I've come for that necklace," he remarked in ordinary conversational tones.

The Count, in the midst of his packing, stopped abruptly and rose to face his visitor.

"I do not understand you."

"You understand me quite well. Mrs. Eames's diamond necklace."

"You are dreaming!"

"That piece of jewelry is here in your cabin."

"Thees ees your leetle game of bluff, no doubt?" answered the Count with his silky voice.

"Are you prepared, if necessary, to submit your luggage to search?"

"Yes!"

That gave John Hallard his cue. "Then I'll trouble you to turn out your pockets."

Ratislaw moved to place his fingers on the bell. "I do not weesh to continue thees conversation. You will please go out, or shall I ring for the steward?"

Hallard pointed to the telephone with which every cabin on the *Ariadne* was equipped. "Better ring up the captain, and ask if I have his authority or not."

The Count paused with his finger on the bell. "Thees ees an outrage!" he blustered.

"I want that necklace lying in your pocket, now."

"Eet belongs to me."

"Ah—your story is that it was given to you?"

"By Major Eames."

"On the contrary, you took it from the purser's safe last night."

The Count involuntarily moved a step backwards, as though to place more space between himself and John Hallard. Into the creamy whiteness of his face had crept a tinge of gray.

"May I take a seat?" asked John Hallard, and moving a chair near to the door, dropped into it uninvited.

"You stole eet yourself!" hissed the Count, guessing at a venture.

"If that is your theory, ring up the captain and have him investigate." And then curtly, with jaw squared: "Drop this pretense! The necklace has been taken. You have it. Who would believe that Major Eames took it from the ship's safe to give it to you?"

"But mine ees the real one! Eet was given me in payment for a debt."

"Then there would be a receipt."

"A debt of honor, I tell you! He lost money to me at piquet."

"Rubbish! On the contrary, you owe him money over piquet."

Exasperated at Hallard's point-blank contradictions, the Count for a moment let his tongue blurt out a word he bitterly regretted the next instant: "When a man sells the secr——"

In a flash, the whole situation lay clear to John Hallard—the key was in his hands. For a moment, he let silence do his work for him; then he rose from his chair and lashed out with the words: "When a man

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sells the secrets of his country, he must expect blackmail—is that your meaning? You got to know it in a burst of drunken confidence. You used that knowledge as a club to force the Major to give you his wife's necklace. You still have the letter or paper that incriminates him. You are still playing cat and mouse with him. Well, listen to this: Captain McIntyre lets no man leave this ship until Mrs. Eames's necklace is in my hands. You don't leave this cabin until I have it and the Major's letter as well. Is that plain, or shall I telephone to the bridge and get assistance?"

"Drop that!" His left hand flashed out and gripped the Count's right hand as it moved toward his pocket. The two men were separated by inches. "Remember this: we're on British territory on board the *Ariadne* and Captain McIntyre can——"

A knock came at the door. Hallard released the Count and went to open it. A steward was in the passage.

"I've come for Count Ratislaw's luggage, sir. We shall be in harbor in a quarter of an hour."

"Come back in five minutes," answered Hallard, and closed the door. Then he turned to the Count: "We're slowing down, but we're on British territory until the captain drops anchor. If he likes, he can turn round and make for sea. . . . . Have you decided?"

"And eef I give them up?" stammered the Count, chalk-white.

"That is all Captain McIntyre requires."

The Austrian took out from his pocket a diamond necklace wrapped in a silk handkerchief and a letter with a Maltese postmark.

"I shall settle thees account with you some day," he hissed.

"I'm agreeable," said Hallard curtly.

A few minutes later he was in the purser's cabin, and showing him the necklace.

"Thank Heaven!" said Wilmer with heartfelt relief. "You're a wonder! . . . . Shall I take it to the Old Man?"

"Better get the Major and Mrs. Eames to identify it first."

Wilmer moved his hand toward a bell.

"No, better keep this as quiet as possible. Suppose you tell the captain, and then bring them here yourself?"

"Right, old chap, I will. And more thanks than I can express!"

When the purser had left, Hallard took out the zircon imitation from the flower-vase and compared the two side by side. The imitation was a wonderful piece of craftsmanship. Only a trained expert could distinguish between the two at sight. He balanced them in his hands lovingly, and a wave of temptation came upon him. How easy it would be to keep the real one and return the imitation!

But that wouldn't be quite the game. He had set out to unshackle the Major from the Count's hold over him, and trust to generosity for his ultimate reward. He would hand over both the necklaces, and the letter with the Maltese postmark, and the Major would surely do the decent thing by him.

Reluctantly, John Hallard put the two necklaces into his handkerchief pocket, side by side.

Wilmer entered the cabin eagerly with the Eameses at his heels.

"You have Sir Ralph to thank for this," he said. "He's a wonder!"

Hallard first handed the letter with the Maltese postmark to Major Eames.

The latter thrust it into his pocket without a word of thanks, and burst out with drunken savageness: "What are you prying into my affairs for? Didn't I tell you I wanted none of your cursed interference? D—— your meddling!"

Hallard's jaw went square at this utterly uncalled-for insult. A bitter retort was on his lips, but he checked it. Instead, he quietly put his hand into the pocket where the two necklaces lay together, and drew out *one*.

"This is yours, I think?" he said to Mrs. Eames, and handed it over.

HALF AN HOUR later, Renie and her husband were on shore and driving through the narrow streets of Constantinople on a brief tour of inspection.

No others of the ship's party were within hearing as she whispered: "What happened?"

"I have a necklace in my pocket," replied her husband.

"*A* necklace! Which one?"

"I'm hanged if I know. I haven't had an opportunity to test it yet. I drew it from a lucky bag. It may be the zircon or it may be the diamond. Let's hope it's the real thing!"

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MANDY TAKES A HAND

by

DUDLEY GLASS

SAND, dry and hot, dripped from the family buggy like water from a mill wheel as old Beck dug her toes into the road and threw her weight against the collar. The July sun beat fiercely down through the scattered pines, and the buggy sagged deeply to the side where Columbus Hook had settled his three hundred pounds of uncomfortable flesh, for even the combined weight of Mandy, nine-year-old Ponce de Leon and little General Oglethorpe could not balance the sheriff's bulk. Columbus had twisted the plow-line reins around the whip socket and was giving divided attention to thumping the laggard mule with a stubby young hickory, mopping the perspiration from beneath his faded wool hat and giving voice to a camp-meeting hymn.

"'O-o-h, wheah shell we be when the harves' come?' " he caroled lustily, dwelling with affection on the full notes. "Git ap thar, Beck. We's late as hit is, and I sho do hate to miss a note f'um an all-day singin'."

Mandy shifted the baby to the other knee and shrank within herself another inch to escape the furnace of her husband's body.

"Thet may be as may be," she asserted without enthusiasm. "Hit's moughty gratifyin' to listen at good singin' and jine in, ef so be the Lawd give you the gif', but hit seems to me lak I allus gets shoved in betwixt some sister what sings lak a guinea-hen skeered by a chicken hawk an' some feller makin' a noise lak a sawmill hittin' a knot. An' sense this prohibition law's been runnin' in Georgy hit do seem to me thet they can't be no kind er social gatherin', f'um a cawn-shuckin' to a buryin', without somebody bootleggin' thet low-down Jacksonville licker eroun' and gittin' the men folks so swizzled up they don't know whar they be at."

The sheriff gave old Beck a resounding thump, but kept his counsel. There are moments when conversation is worse than futile.

"An' futhermo'," continued his spouse, "hit do seem to me, Columbus Hook, thet hit's yo' bounden duty as sheriff of Burr County to ketch some of these heah travelin' blind tigers and drag 'em befo' Jedge Swiggett. The Lawd knows hit oughtn't to be a task, with yo' nose fo' licker and them a-smellin' lak a still-house."

The sheriff wiggled painfully but paused before speaking. The subject was as unpleasant as it was familiar.

"I done tole you a hun'ed times, Mandy Hook, ef I hev tole you onc't," he protested, "thet I can't be 'restin' folks on gen'l suspicions without due warrant of law, as the jedge says. Hit's all right to suspicion a feller of havin' blind-tiger licker on his pusson, but I ain't got no search warrant fo' ev'y man in Burr County, and I can't go sniffin' eroun" a-liftin' folkses' coat-tails because their breath hez a bunghole flavor. Of co'se, ef I had plain evidence thet er man had more'n a pint of licker on his pusson, thet bein' the limit allowed by law, hit would be my bounden duty to enfo'ce the statutes. But I ain't

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no detectif, an' futhermo' I ain't goin' to make my good frien's mad at me by spyin' eroun', with good licker as skeerce an' hard to git as hit is these days in Georgy."

They finished the mile to Big Bethel Springs in silence, broken only by the baby's whimpering and an occasional bark from old Bullet, the veteran hound, which trotted beneath the buggy in the shade. But Mandy Hook was thinking. Ever since the night Columbus had stolen away and left her to guard the jail against a lynching party, Mandy had realized that her husband was more inclined toward political sagacity than determination to uphold the law.

The peddling of "blind-tiger" whisky had continued uninterruptedly since the passage of the prohibition law, and the women, grown tired of seeing husbands and sons the worse for a liquid of fearsome formula concocted in some Jacksonville cellar and shipped across the line, had pleaded for some action by officials of the law.

There was no W. C. T. U. in Burr County and Mandy had never heard of Carrie Nation and her followers, but she had made up her mind that something must be done. She faced the delicate problem of forcing her unwilling husband to act against his will and at the same time protect him not only from public anger and ridicule but against his own egotism.

"Wouldn't never do in the worl' fo' Lum to think I kin boss him," Mandy had often said to herself. "Hit natchully comes to thet anyways, but so long as he don't suspicion hit he's jes' as happy."

II

THE all-day singing bade fair to be the event of the Summer. Old Bethel Springs, the scene of camp meetings and primitive "foot-washings" for a hundred years, was dotted with farm wagons and buggies, with dozens of single saddle horses hitched beneath the trees. Down in the hollow, near the spring, Zeke Tummerlin and a dozen negroes were basting the savory barbecue and stirring its accompanying Brunswick stew, and the fragrance crept through the sultry air to the great arbor on the hillside where the worshipers had gathered.

It was here, in the rustic pergola of logs, thatched with pine branches, that the good people of the Little Bend circuit assembled each July for a feast of sacred song, varied with occasional prayers and exhortations led by some fervid evangelist or circuit rider, and broken at mid-day by the feast of the barbecue. No organ nor orchestra profaned the hymns of these descendants of the pioneers; no chosen choir monopolized the privilege of song. With some local celebrity or a touring vocalist on the rostrum to beat time and line out the less familiar hymns; with a few skilled tenors or clear-voiced "tribbles" setting the pace a good half-bar ahead of the congregation, Little Bend could put up as lusty a brand of music as any circuit in Georgia, and volume and enthusiasm, rather than unison or melody, was the goal of the assemblage.

No modern solos, no operatic arias, charmed the ear at these singings; no secular ballad or rag-time tune jarred upon the spirit of the day. It is doubtful whether any man in the county could recall a song not in the church's old square-note hymnal, unless it were a fragment of "Old Dan Tucker," or a snatch of the words which made "Dixie" a tune to swear by. The drunkest old reprobate, staggering home from the county-seat, might change as the whim suited him from swearing to singing, but the song would as likely be "Rock of Ages" as not. The "all-day singings" stuck to the good old program, hymns with the militant spirit of the pioneers, like: "How Firm a Foundation," and "Greenland's Icy Mountains." And nobody in twenty miles who had a horse or could borrow one, missed the annual event, unless he were bed-ridden or in jail.

The strains of the long-meter doxology, indicating a recess in the vocal exercises, were reverberating from the pines when the sheriff turned his equipage into the grove. A score of hounds, their backs bristling and their tails at a threatening angle, ran out to greet the late-comers, and sniffed suspiciously at old Bullet, mutely acknowledging his fellowship and good standing in the mysterious freemasonry of dogdom.

The sheriff painfully lifted his great bulk from the creaking buggy and led old Beck to the shade of a live oak on the hillside, leaving Mandy and her brood to reach the arbor as best they might. The flower of Southern chivalry does not flourish in the flatwoods.

Ponce de Leon slipped a bit of rope

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around Bullet's neck and dragged him toward the congregation.

"What d'you 'low yo' goin' do with thet dawg?" asked his mother, good-humoredly.

"Pappy he tole me nuvver to leave Bullet nigh to no other body's dawgs," explained Ponce de Leon. "Pappy he says thar's too many shootin' scrapes done riz up already over wuthless houn's fightin' amongst theyselves, an' he don't aim to lose no frien's 'twixt now an' 'lection day. So I'm jes' fixin' to fetch old Bullet along with me an' keep him quiet. He won't 'sturb the meetin'."

"Wal, ef hit comes to thet," assented Mandy, "I hev heard wuss singin' then what old Bullet makes when he's tuck trail arter a fox-critter. Bring him along, Poncy, but make him behave hisself."

FROM the arbor, past the knot of men that clogged the entrance, emerged a lank form, swathed in an ancient frock coat, known in Georgia as a Prince Albert, which might have been a handsome garment in the first McKinley administration. The wearer paused as he met the new arrivals and a beatific smile added another to the nest of wrinkles on his face.

"Wal, Sister Hook," remarked the circuit rider, "I had give up you-all was comin'. An' whar's Brother C'lumbus? I was jes' goin' down to the spring arter a drink. I hev been moved by this conference and thet f'um the mountings of Habersham to the marshes of Glynn, as the book says, but I mus' say thet they ain't no water in all Georgy like Old Bethel Springs."

"Thet may be, Brother Daggett, an' I hev no doubt hit is," returned Mandy. "But to jedge f'um some of these men folks what's careerin' 'roun' the meetin' groun's an' tryin' to look solemn an' laugh all to onc't, hit would seem lak they've been samplin' somethin' mo' vig'rous than spring water. Jes' look at little Cic'ro Sparks, over under thet gum tree. He's got his hat sot back on his bal' spot an' his ches' puffed out like a pigeon breas', when mos' of the time he goes mopin' eroun' so low-sperited he'd take sass off'n a cawn-fiel' nigger.

"An' look at Bud Billup, mixin' erbout and talkin' easy and sof'-soapy, with thet long-tail coat and thet new derby hat. Looks to me like Bud's been takin' on flesh sence he's been travelin' eroun' and erbout. I ain't seen him sence the big foot-washin', but I'm ready to b'lieve he's in some devilry. I take notice thet whurever yo' see Bud Billup you kin smell cawn licker."

"I suspicion you're right, Sister Hook," returned the circuit rider. "Hit has been my idee thet Bud gen'ally is in the fo'front of evil. I have sighted him slippin' to'des the grove off an' on all the mawnin', takin' some brother with him ev'y time, and hit's my belief, ef you won't let it go no further, thet Bud is the fountinghead of the rum devil in these parts. Of co'se, I wouldn't go so fur as to sw'ar to it. I like the good people in Little Bend circuit, and I don't want to offend. A preacher has got to be keerful, Sister Hook. But ef Bud could be tuk up and give a taste of the law, I'd be mo' than pleased, p'vided they didn't lay it to my do'."

The sheriff rejoined his spouse as the preacher departed for the spring, and together they moved toward the arbor. But Bud Billup, the center of a jovial group near the entrance, beckoned a quiet invitation to the big official and Lum dropped behind his wife and the children.

"You-all git a seat down close to the front an' kinder spread out an' save room fur me," he suggested. "I hev a word to say to a man I sees out thar."

III

IT WAS twenty minutes before he returned, and Mandy sniffed suspiciously as he took his seat, carefully keeping Ponce de Leon and the baby between himself and her.

"Hez Big Bethel Spring tuk to runnin' red licker, or hez somebody done stahted a wil'-cat still up hits headwaters?" asked Mandy, sarcastically. "Or maybe, ez sheriff, you've been searchin' out evidence. Ef so, you hev sutt'nly found it an' brought it into coht."

"The's a heap of diff'unce between a feller's invitin' yo' behin' a tree, quiet and awd'lly, and givin' yo' a triflin' nip out'n a small-size bottle, and runnin' a travelin' blin' tiger, ez well you knows, Mandy," protested the sheriff. "They ain't no law thet I knows on to p'vent a frien' f'um treatin' a frien', so long ez they ain't no money changin' han's, an' p'vided he don't tote no more'n the one pint the law allows

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him. Leastways, thet's my readin' of the code."

"Thet long-tail coat what Bud Billup is flauntin' erbout in 'pears to me to be pow'-ful hot fur a day lak this," remarked Mandy. "You didn't, by no manner of means, happen to shake him to see ef he'd rattle, I reckon."

"You wimmin folks hez allus got somethin' agin Bud," returned Mr. Hook. "Jes' because he was a leetle mite wild in his young days and busted up a few meetin's with his devilment, you lay all the meanness in Burr County agin him. An' Bud's the fines' hymn singer and tune leader in Little Bend circuit, when he's got the sperit on him."

"He sutt'nly kin sing," retorted Mrs. Hook. "But I 'low hit's the sperrits in him, stidder on him, what makes the music flow. Ef he's sproutin' angel's feathers, why ain't he leadin' the singin' to-day, or is he too busy treatin' ev'ybody at Big Bethel out'n thet small-size bottle you jes' mentioned?"

"Ef yo' so cu'yus to know, yo' mought ax him yo'self," retorted the sheriff. "Heah he comes now."

"I'll do thet thing," said Mandy, determinedly. And the woman in her asserted itself as she gave a greeting to the unconscious subject of her remarks. The words were ingratiating, but Bud didn't observe the glint in Mandy's black eyes.

"Why, hit's Mr. Billup," said Mandy. "Reckon I'll hev to name you Mister nowadays, though hit don't seem lak a week sence yo' wuz runnin' bar'foot in my pappy's yahd. You look moughty spruced up in thet jim swinger coat. Ain't it moughty hot fur sech weather? But law, you folks what's been to the city don't seem to bother 'bout feelin' good so long es yo' looks good."

"Why, no, ma'am, I'm putty comfo'ble, thank ye, ma'am," returned Bud, reddening. "Hit's all in bein' used to it, ez the man says what slept with a pet snake."

"Me an' C'lumbus, we's jes' been honin' to heah yo' sing," continued Mandy. "Hit don't seem lak a reg'lar singin' 'less'n Bud Billup's up thar on the platfawm raisin' the tunes and beatin' time. I see Brother Daggett a-lookin' at yo' now. He needs yo' to help rouse up the sinners an' staht the shoutin'."

Bud flushed painfully.

"I don't know ez Brother Daggett names me ez a sheep or a goat," he protested. "I don't recolleck him fallin' ovah nobody to give me the glad han' of fellership this mawnin'. In fac', he 'pears to size me up ez a backslider, an' I reckon I am."

"Wal, spunk up and show 'im yo' ain't so bad," urged Mrs. Hook. "Climb up thar and staht thet 'Old-Time Religion.' I'm a-pinin' to heah hit onc't mo'."

"I'll tackle her one time ef hit busts a string," declared Mr. Billup. He turned and strode determinedly, even if a bit unsteadily, toward the rough platform which formed pulpit and leader's rostrum for the arbor. It was built of rough-hewn boards supported by slender posts chopped from saplings, and Mandy's sharp eyes had noticed that the corner nearest her swayed unsteadily on its frail support.

"I knows yo' ain't afeerd to do yo' duty ez sheriff, C'lumbus," she remarked to her lord and master. "Of co'se, yo' ain't expected to be spyin' eroun', ez yo' said befo', but in case a bootlegger jes' pintedly up an' 'sposed his whole stock of licker, right out in meetin', yo' couldn't do nothin' else but tek him up, could yo', Lum?"

"Why, in thet case, I'd hev to do my duty," admitted Mr. Hook. "Couldn't nobody 'spec' me to do nothin' else. But thet ain't goin' to happen. Leastways, hit nuvver has."

"You can't nuvver tell," observed Mandy. "Hit mought an' then again hit moughtn't."

Old Bullet, slumbering beneath their feet, stirred uneasily and emitted a few staccato yelps, while his paws began moving rapidly through the air. The old hound was chasing rabbits in his sleep. Columbus kicked him sharply in the ribs and Ponce de Leon bent down to pat him tenderly on the head.

"Yo' oughtn't to hev brought thet dawg into meetin', Poncy," remonstrated Mandy, indulgently. "S'pos'n' yo' take thet plowline an' tie him to thet corner post under the platfawm. He'll git mo' elbow-room thar an' hev less to bother him."

Ponce de Leon dragged the reluctant hound from beneath the bench and tied the rope securely around the rotting post, close under the beam which supported the flimsy rostrum. Bullet settled down comfortably in the cool shade and resumed his interrupted dream.

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IV

BROTHER DAGGETT had finished his opening remarks and was lining out the hymn, that time-tried favorite of a Georgia camp-meeting, "The Old-Time Religion." Bud Billup, having shaken hands shamefacedly with the preacher, advanced toward the waiting congregation and lifted his voice in song:

"Hit's the old-time religion,
Hit's the old-time religion,
Hit's the old-time religion,
An' hit's good enough fur me."

The congregation joined in lustily and soon the benches were swaying with the motion of the worshipers. Bud's arms swung high and low as the song rose and fell; his head was thrown back in ecstasy, his eyes shining with pure delight. The spirit of the singer was on him. Bud Billup, sinner, blind tiger, ne'er-do-well, had vanished and Mr. Anthony Billup, musician, was in the ascendant. He shook his glossy black locks from his forehead and strode up and down as he sang.

Mandy Hook, unobserved by the spell-bound congregation, rose softly and slipped away to the buggy on the hillside. Groping under the seat, she brought forth the sheriff's hunting-horn, noted throughout the county for its far-carrying tone. Old Bullet had followed that horn for many a moonlit mile through the river bottoms and would have answered it from his grave.

Mandy climbed into the buggy, and from this point of vantage could see the rostrum and the song-thralled Mr. Billup. He was warming up to his work:

"Hit was good fur Paul an' Silas,
Hit was good fur Paul an' Silas,
Hit was good fur Paul an' Silas,
An' hit's good enough fur me."

As the hymn thundered out across the fields, the leader strode back and forth, keeping time with his hands, his whole body swaying. As he turned toward the weaker corner of the stage, Mandy, watching from the hill, raised the horn to her lips. Bud took one more step, and a blast rang out which should have waked the slumberers in the churchyard.

It did wake old Bullet from his visions of the chase and he sprang to his feet, yelping as he rose. The rope drew taut as the hound gave tongue and lunged toward the summons, and the rotten post gave way as Bud reached the crescendo of his effort. There was a thud and a silvery crash as the singer struck the ground.

The sheriff, close to the front row, was one of the first to the rescue of the fallen singer and there was consternation in his tones as he raised Bud to his feet.

"Why you ain't hurt, Buddy, is you?" he asked. "You 'pears to me to be bleedin' all over."

Then the full odor of the fluid which had soaked through the admired garment reached the sheriff's nostrils. He turned in confusion, but Mandy was at his elbow, her black eyes snapping with delight.

"Better take off his coat, C'lumbus," she suggested, meaningly. "Looks lak he mought be hurt bad. Thet do seem to be a lot of wetness f'um one small-size bottle."

From the remonstrating Mr. Billup the sheriff dragged the dripping coat, and a shower of broken glass and corks fell from the forty pockets which the tailor had thoughtfully provided. Columbus Hook breathed a sigh of regret, and assumed the official tone of his office.

"Bud Billup, hit is my duty as sheriff of Burr County to place you under arres' fur violatin' the statutes of the State of Georgy, as made an' p'vided accawdin'," he announced. "I reckon yo'd better saddle yo' hoss and take a little ride with me. But I sho' do wish thet platfawm had helt up 'till you'd hit the las' verse of thet 'Old-Time Religion.'"

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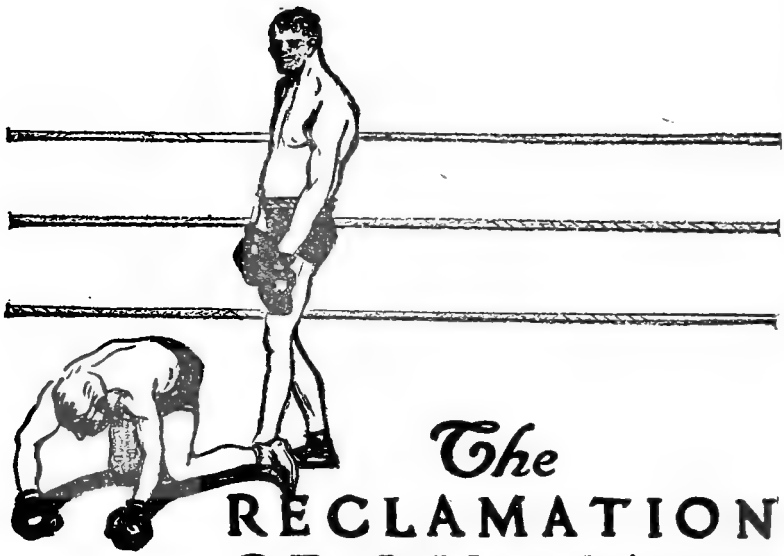

The RECLAMATION OF KID SAND

by J. M. ALLEN*

I FIGGER that my jaw's a pretty fair article, seein' it's still plumb with the rest o' my face, 'cause what the strong-arm slammed on it wasn't no love-tap by six hundred and odd pounds. Oh, he got me good, with my little hands in my little pockets holdin' tight to my little change and—*bing!* It was curtains for me, all right, all right; and while I lay there dreamin' o' home and mother, in front o' my own door in the dark hall, the guy shook me down for eight dollars and a quarter—the roll bein' in my shoe.

It was enough to make a man sore on himself forever. Me, *me*, mind you, who's handed out the slumber in ninety-one fights and side-stepped it in fifteen more, to take the count at the first punch—say, just the thought of it makes me sick!

Well, the first I got straight after that, I was just about askin' what round was I out in, when I noticed 'twas a woman bendin' over me and holdin' a camphor bottle to my nose, so I changed my question to "What's goin' on?"

And that's how it begun, with the punch in the jaw, first aid to the injured, and then, naturally, acquaintance. She lived just off the same hall as me. See? That's how she came to be so Johnny-on-the-job when the hold-up got through with me.

Course I ain't been here long from the Coast; and she—while she's been in the city or suburbs for some few years, she ain't reckless in makin' friends, and so don't know many people. Consequently after we got acquainted we made company for each other. Course she stalled me at first, till she found my bark was worse'n my bite, but after that we was good pals. I knowed from the first, though, that she was ninety ways different from the skirts I'd been strong for when I was takin' down the long money; that she was on the level strictly, modest, and—aw well, say—she was the kind o' woman you'd take to visit your mother. See? Well, I told her all about yours truly, so she could put me down and no hard feelin's.

And that was a funny thing; funny to me, even. Here was I, plumb nutty for her society, yet fixin' the details for her to put me on the skids. Figger that out. But that was a symptom o' her influence, that comin' clean first and figgerin' the consequences afterward. I didn't hold out a thing. I told her I was a plumber again these last three years, after a seven-years' recess when I'd quit wipin' joints to get mine with the

*See page 632.

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padded mits. That I'd fought better than a hundred fights and was in line for a crack at the champ when I quit the game. And I told her how I come to quit.

Of the set-backs and call-downs I'd got outside the ring from men who went wild over my fightin'; young fellows who mustn't recognize me if their fathers was with them; old sports who couldn't see me if their daughters was in sight; everybody strong for me in my fightin' togs, and nobody with class a friend o' mine in my street clothes. That showed me where I stood. Then I saw the dubs that had taken the count—the has-beens and full-cheeses, and I saw what a chance blow might bring me to.

And then I told her how, when all this had soaked into me good, I had seconded Steve Finney, when, with his second wind and third helpin' o' red whisky, he copped it too hard on Al Rafferty—six pile-drivin' smashes over the heart, they was, as fast as you could count them. How Steve stood back, laughin' at Al all piled up, till suddenly the referee stopped countin', kneeled over Al a minute, and then says, quiet and stupid-like, "Why, Good God! This boy is dead."

I told her how that let me out o' the game and back to wipin' joints again when I could get a job. Then, when I was done, I set my teeth and waited; but she didn't say a word.

Then I looked up to see what was the matter. Her head was bowed, her hands folded in her lap, and tears was runnin' down her cheeks. That got my goat. Thinks I, "Sure, she's hurt. And why not? She's a decent woman—maybe never saw a bruiser before." So I beat it, kid, beat it for keeps. With my hand on the door-knob, I tried to apologize,

"Mrs. Sanderson, I'm sorry—just as sorry as I can be. It looked like I just had to tell you, because you was so good and friendly to me, not knowin' who I was. Course I ought to a-knowed you couldn't be friendly with a pugilist no more'n an angel could, though I did hope that, seein' I've cut it and tried to run away from the name, that might count some in my favor. I see my mistake now—see it plain. But I hope you won't feel any worse about it than you can help, for you are the first good woman who's lost any time with me since I was a kid; and it hurts to see you sorry for it. I can and will drop out of your acquaintance easier than I dropped in and nobody will be wise. And I'll always love to think that if I'd been different we'd a-been friends, for never in my life have I wanted anybody's friendship like I do yours!"

"Mr. Grant," says she in a low, sad voice—man, you just ought to hear her voice!—"don't go yet. You are all wrong, and—and I too have something to say—to confess. That you are what you are, after what you have been, is heroic. All right-thinking people must honor you for it. I know I do and always shall. I know, better than other women, how irresistible is the applause of the mob and the easily gotten money. I sympathize with your shame over your past life, for my son, my little Billie, my only child, has gone into prize-fighting as a profession; and neither self-respect nor love for his lonely mother—and my boy loves his mother—has dissuaded him.

"I had a letter from him yesterday. He is in a little town named Corona in the southern part of the State. He writes me that a man called 'Webfoot' Oliver is his manager. In my last letter I begged him to come back to his mother and respectability. He answers that he will come back just as soon as he has fought his way to the top where the big prizes are; that his manager prophesies great things for him, as soon as he gets experience, so he is going to work hard to get to the big money while I am yet young enough to enjoy it.

"To think a mother could enjoy such money! Poor boy, he isn't twenty yet, and I don't know what to do—I don't know what to do!"

And her feelin's tore loose this time and she cried the sure-enough woman cry.

Me? Say, I went dotty for fair. I tried tellin' her that there was different sorts o' fighters, dirty, medium and square, same as doctors, lawyers and preachers, and that I knowed one pug who used to say a little prayer just prior to the call o' time. But I had just told her the right facts o' the game and couldn't hedge worth a cent. So I just talked promiscuous, as you might say, till she got right again. But we was friends now, and I sure was glad I'd come clean.

AFTER that I got into the habit of droppin' in nearly every night for a chat. I'd set and tell her about my chasin' after the job, and she'd tell me the

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news of the skirt factory where she worked, and then somehow the talk would always drift around to that boy o' hers and what could be done to bring him to his right mind. There's where your uncle James U. Grant went on the job—him and his jolly.

The widow had got to the point where she owned that she missed me the nights I was out too late to visit, and I was beginnin' to think I had a look-in with her, anyhow, when one of the Sunday papers comes out with a big picture of Kid Sand—that was the widow's boy's fightin' name—and a challenge from his manager, "Webfoot" Oliver, to match him at 135 pounds against any man in the Mississippi valley who would put up a side bet of five hundred.

My jolly failed that night—fell flat; so when I went to my room I put the finishin' touches on a scheme I'd been afraid I'd have to try out from the start. The kid had to be *made* to get put o' the fightin' game. His mother couldn't coax him, common sense couldn't move him, so he just had to be knocked out of it; and as near as I could figger, it was up to me.

Course I was gettin' a bit old and stale, dead stale; but I know the game from the bell. I've never been a lusher and I figgered that I sure ought to be able to get to a green kid who'd beaten not more than six or eight men. Anyhow there was a chance, and if I could beat him to his own satisfaction, and take the fightin' spirit out o' him, why, the right livin' might look better to him; and afterward maybe, when I'd got a job, why, the widow might come to think she wouldn't mind me jollyin' her right on through life.

Course I didn't have no five hundred, but I did have two hundred, so I packed my little grip, slipped a note under the widow's door tellin' her I was leavin' town unexpectedly to be gone two or three weeks, and I was ridin' toward Corona by daybreak.

II

CORONA is just a little, dirty, brawling, coal-mining town. Liquor sellin' is its second-best industry. It's the kind of burg that always needs another hospital and more surgeons. If I was to die unchanged, I hope nothin' worse would happen to me than to be sent to Corona.

The first man I met directed me to Webfoot's saloon, but I made my toilet before I called on him. My toilet consisted in wrappin' a couple o' sheets around my waist next to my hide, to make me look fat; massaging under my eyes till I got up a baggy swellin', so as to get the whisky-soaked effect; then I got a man-size drink of the worst liquor in town to get my breath into harmony, after which I was ready for Webfoot.

I went to his saloon, but his barkeep said he was sittin' in a game up-stairs and that I had better wait if my business was important. So I strolled out in front, and there I saw an abbreviated darky in a sweater, who was built so that seven-eighths of him was above the waist-line. Most of the other eighth was in feet. Well, it didn't take two looks for me to recognize a pug, and a pug in hard luck at that. Might be he fought for Webfoot.

"Son," says I, "how's the game hereabouts?"

He turned a pair o' cloudy-lookin' lamps on me a minute and then, in a slow and sleepy voice, he answered,

"It's good for the eats if you got a drag wid Webfoot. Are you lookin' for a go?"

"Why, yes," said I, "I come over to see if I can get on with this Kid Sand that Webfoot thinks so well of. Saw about him in the papers yesterday and thought I'd run over and lick him before it slipped my mind. Are you matched?"

"Naw; I'm in bad wid Web now-a-days. I got too interested in a go wid a dub two weeks ago and punched him out aftah Web done told me to lay down. Web lost a couple o' hundred by it, and so that was about all foh me. It's up to me now, I guess, either to beat it or else hunt up a pick an' shovel. Say, if you git on wid Sand, you'll need a trainer, won't yuh? Could you use me? You ought to could," and he smiled sleepily at my bulgin' stomach.

"Son," says I, "stick here till I've seen Web. If I do the business with him, I maybe can fit you in a job if you are not rapacious."

So after a little I went back into the saloon and there was Web waitin' for me. While he was sizin' up my toilet, I was takin' notice that he was a clean-faced, thin-lipped, cold-eyed, iron-gray gambler, and I judged him not above bettin' on a cinch. Well, I told him my business and he told

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me to forget it—that most any has-been would take a lickin' from Kid Sand so as to get the loser's twenty-five per cent. but that he wasn't fallin' for that; and was walking away when I mentioned a side bet o' two hundred dollars.

He turned around; I flashed my roll; and in twenty minutes I was matched to meet Kid Sand at 135 pounds, for seventy-five per cent. of the gate receipts and a side bet of four hundred dollars; the mill to be pulled off in two weeks. My toilet had sure been a winner.

Then I went out and saw my darky. Speakeasy he was called, and he had everything I wanted. Best of all, he knowed a darky family in the country who had a place that would be all heart could desire for trainin' quarters. So by six o'clock that night me and Speakeasy had moved out and gone to work. Hot work—What?

For two flyin' weeks we kept at it. I knowed what I needed to do and how to do it and Speakeasy was forever willin'. At the end of the two weeks we was both fit, though I couldn't help noticin' that trainin' would never again make me the man I had been when I passed up the game nearly four years ago. But I had a hunch I didn't have to be, to win this match. So, the night scheduled, I was in Corona, ready and full of confidence.

III

THE go was to be pulled off in what they called the Corona Athletic Club's gymnasium. This was a hall over Webfoot's saloon where he put on all his fights. Webfoot, I think, *was* the Club. From what talk I heard, I judged that the natives figured that Web had decoyed another dub into facing Kid Sand.

The scenery from the ring was just like the way things looked to me at my first go when I milled at top speed for nineteen rounds and scored a knock-out for fifty dollars in money and fifty million in glory. A couple o' hundred men sitting and a hundred more standin' against the wall stretched the little hall to its limit. The air was full o' cigar-smoke and joshin', but the noise died down when I climbed on the platform and through the ropes, Speakeasy behind me with a bucket and towel.

For thirty seconds they sized me up, and then I heard some guy remark, "Positively the last appearance of Rip Van Winkle." And a man right within six feet of me says, "He looks game, all right." But a man behind him offered him two to one I'd be *dead* game in four rounds, and he said, "I don't back my sympathies."

Well, ringside talk never did affect my goat, and I was sittin' pretty while Speakeasy was givin' me a line of talk suited to kindergarten scrappers, when a yell went up, then another, then the whole mob caught on; and I rubbered over for my first look at Kid Sand.

He was a grand-lookin' boy—I saw that as soon as he straightened up and bowed after crawlin' through the ropes. Course I couldn't judge his condition yet, because he had on a bath-robe, but his eye was clear and bright, his laugh natural and his motion easy and springy, showin' that he felt fit. He was an inch or two taller than me, with a game jaw, and I saw he had a good reach. Looked like my work was cut out for me, unless the bath-robe was hidin' a contradiction. Gee! I could feel the old fightin' spirit mountin' into me already, and for a minute I slipped back to the time when the best thing in a fight was the wild joy of fightin'. The Kid himself called me back to my mutton. He had crossed over to my corner and was shaking my hand.

"Glad to meet you, 'Old Timer,'" says he, "how're you feelin'?"

"Oh, moderate," says I. "Have a good supper?"

"Just meat," says he, "I figger on you to furnish the dessert."

"Now that was rash," says I; "my stunt is chastisin' greedy kids."

"Well, you ain't workin' at your trade to-night, daddy. I'll show you in a few minutes. Hello, Speakeasy," and he went back to his corner.

Well, the gloves were divided, the referee pulled off his little spiel, I skinned off my coat and breeches and in a minute—*bing!* the scrap was on.

And say, the boy looked better yet, comin' at me. Smooth pink skin, good thick shoulders, clean-muscled legs, oh, he had everything. Course I felt him out without extending myself to start with and he didn't hold out a thing on me. Guess he figgered to win some of those four-round bets for his friends, by the way he uncorked hooks, jabs and swings. I had a pretty lively time blockin', brushin' 'em aside and

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easin' away, and one or two landed but did no harm. Just before the bell, findin' an invitin' openin', I shot one of my best right into his stomach, which must have hurt his feelin's.

"Kid," says I, "if you ain't careful you will show me your whole box o' tricks before we get to goin' good."

Speakeasy had my coat around me when I hit the stool.

"Say," says he, "where do I git on, tellin' you how to fight? You got mo' knowledge o' fightin' in er minute'n I'll ever have. My face is shut en I devotes my talents after dis ter agertatin' dis towel. You sholy fights!"

BING! And here comes the near-Terry McGovern like a shot out of a gun! In a flash, hook, chop, punch, he's shootin' 'em at me from every angle, and I sure am the busy kid. There's the happiest grin on his face you can think of; he's just runnin' over with confidence.

"Come on, old timer," says he, "git in the game! The water's fine! I won't muss you up much. Shut your eyes if you are scared. I'll back you into a corner in a minute and it'll be all over but gettin' the money. Come out o' the shell! Oh, please hit me, or bite me or kick at me or somethin'! These folks paid money to see us go. They'll have you pinched for swindlin'."

And all the time he's shootin' 'em at me. So just by way of keepin' him in good cheer and because I was findin' myself, I moved into him. And, say, it was hot stuff! The boy sure had the punch and the willingness to put me away. Course I was takin' most o' his smashes on the side o' my head —and an ax wouldn't hurt me much there —but now and then an upper-cut come through that didn't do me a bit o' good; so I got in closer yet.

He was inches taller'n me, so I was all alone with his stomach. They used to give it to me for my stomach punch; so with this husky boy to work on, the committee spared no pains. At the bell, my head was aginst his chest and my right mit was drillin' him just above his belt, same as one of these pneumatic hammers they drive rivets with.

"Like it?" says I, as we separated.

"Old timer, you're a peach!" says he.

The house was in an uproar and some of the sympathy money took a chance on me. Speakeasy was silent like he promised, but his way o' workin' with me was eloquent with satisfaction and his handlin' had a mother's touch lookin' like a mule-kick for tenderness. But I could notice that I wasn't as fresh as I would have been ten years ago, and a still, small voice was tellin' me that if I didn't get him in two or three more rounds, I'd most likely come in for some bad luck.

He came at me with just a bit more caution, still grinnin', but not so cock-sure. He saw I had somethin' on him at short range, so there was nothin' more doin' at that number, and I was in for the volleys again. Time was when I'd have let him use up some of his extra steam that way, and then git him as he slowed down, but now I knowed that I couldn't wait. Either I must put the fixin' on soon, or it was curtains for me.

So I went to work to make the openin' for my old favorite bread-winner. It was simply to invite a left swing, and, while ducking it, raise my left mit as if blocking, and then snatch it out and down to the point. Course it's a risky move, 'cause, first, if you misjudge his swing, why, you are on your way out; then, if you don't land your smash just right you are again in a lovely position to get second money. You either win or lose right there.

So, blockin', smotherin', shiftin', I gave him an openin' at my jaw big enough to swing a cat in. He swung like a flash, and my bean bobbed on schedule time. *Bang!* Oh, I caught him good, and jumped away so he could fall clear. The house was screamin' in a minute, so I couldn't hear the referee count, but I noticed his eye go round to Webfoot every time his hand fell. Now, the round hadn't gone over two minutes, and I was just thinkin' that if the Kid did get to his feet, one more smash would address him to home and mother, and the referee's hand had just fell for the eighth count—when *bing* went the gong and his seconds hopped into the ring and carried him to his corner. Rough work? Say, wheelin' slag is delicate beside it!

Speakeasy blew up. For once in his life he raised his voice. Across the ring he started, carryin' two fistfuls o' trouble to the referee, but Webfoot met him half-way. Under the howlin' o' the mob his voice come smooth, keen and most persuadin'.

"Speakeasy," says he, "you keep your

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trap shut! If I hear from you again, I'll kill you, so help me!"

And he swung half around and showed Speakeasy a big gun in his hip pocket. That was all—and plenty. Webfoot was known to hate four flushin'. Speakeasy had murder in him when he come back.

"Boss," says he, "if yuh can kill that guy, kill him dead. It's the only way. Webfoot's got this thing framed an' riveted for yuh. Ain't no way but just kill him plumb dead, en if you cain't do that, yuh might just as well lay down and take the count when the bell taps. You's up against the stiffest brace on earth—en—en—I wish I could hold yo' job for just two rounds!"

THEY gave the Kid mighty close to two minutes before the gong rang again, and I heard Webfoot tell him as he left his corner,

"Now, mind what I tell you and be careful!"

I could see his head was clearing, and got ready for quick action.

"Kid," says I, and I was good and mad—cold mad; not excited, not nervous, just bitter mad in every ounce of me; "Kid, you and your pals can't rob me of this fight. I'll get you if it's the last thing I do—get you so you can't come back!"

And I ripped my right into his stomach. Then he clinched me and as we swayed there in the center of the ring he whispered in my ear,

"They're robbing you all right, but I ain't in on it. I got to get you, the way they've framed it, but you shall have every dime I take down for it. I hate to beat you, old timer. You're a game sport and they're certainly robbin' you. But I can't lay down; so there you are. But you'll get what I take down and that goes!"

Now, could you beat it? The boy has his choice of bein' a quitter or a thief and is tryin' to be as near on the level as he could. Now it was up to me to break him o' fightin' for his own sake as well as his mother's. He was too square to be a fighter. Meantime, I noticed that the referee, seein' him loafin' on my shoulder, ain't never once hinted "break" to us. So I threw the kid off and tore into him.

Straight punches in the stomach backed him into a corner and the milling there was somethin' fierce; and I was tiring somethin' fierce, too. I eased in for my old bread-winner again, drew his fire, ducked it and—missed him clean!

I never knew exactly where he hit me, but I felt myself sinking, then a gong clanged in my head-piece somewhere, and the next hazy memory I have, I was spread face down on the padded floor, and the referee was sayin', "four—five—six——"

Sort o' dazed like, the idea came to me, "Get up, he's countin' you out," and I started up. But I heard Speakeasy's calm, confident voice sayin',

"Take nine there—don't hurry!"

That helped me a whole lot—the sound o' Speakeasy's friendly voice; and at nine, I was back on my feet again, not fit, but still fightin'.

I could feel the smashes on my head, shoulders and arms as he tried to slip the finish through my fold up. I could feel the soft shock as I hit back, but I was plumb dotty in the bean and stallin' for time.

The ring was rockin' like a raft; the howls from the mob sounded like the far-away wind in the tree-tops. There was a taste of blood in my mouth. The Kid wasn't a human bein' to me any more. He seemed like a great big hairy spider. And I remember I was mumblin' to myself all the time "Hit him hard—for his mother—on the jaw—for his mother—don't fall—hit him hard—on the jaw—for his mother."

But the Kid was too anxious. Maybe the crowd's yellin' rattled him or somethin'. Anyhow, with me in a corner, he set himself, drew back for a haymaker and left an openin' you could have turned a bus in. Well, I've never yet been too groggy to know what to do with an opportunity hand-tailored to my measure. With all my weight, all the strength I had left, all there was in me, I shot my right to the point of his jaw, saw him topple forward, and then staggered to the nearest post and hugged it to keep from fallin' myself.

A fat man at my feet said,

"Some fight? What?"

BUT the Kid was out for keeps and I knew it. The round's end was rung half a minute too soon and they gave him two full minutes in his corner, but I'd got him so he couldn't come back. So the referee come over to me and held up my right hand and then the crowd, most of which had gone broke with that smash of mine, jumped up on their chairs

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and cheered for me. Ever notice that the crowd, as a rule, is a good sport? Right behind the referee was Webfoot with the purse in his hand. He passed me the roll in full view of the crowd; and while they was cheerin' him for a game loser, he put his arm around my neck and was whisperin' to me,

"Say, old fox, my business is cryin' for you! What's the matter with you takin' me on for your manager? There's pecks and pecks o' money 'round here that was minted for you, and if you'll let me pick the easy marks for you, you'll own a corner saloon in a year. Eh? How does that listen?"

I never turned a hair.

"It listens a symphony," says I. "Say it to me in two weeks, after I have cashed some o' this money into *à la carte* whisky."

"Right," says he; "if you go broke, wire your uncle Web."

The Kid was cryin' like a baby in his corner. His seconds looked like he made them tired. I judge they loved winners.

"Kid," says I, "can you shake again?" We shook, though he didn't look up at me. "Son," says I, leanin' over so the others couldn't hear, "I got a bunch o' talk for you that I've been collectin' for quite a spell. Fact is, this little mill we had was just a preliminary to what I want to get off my chest. Besides that, I know all the one-minute cures for that chain-lightnin' pain in the head you're havin' now. I want you to ride over to my lodgin' with me and let me dope you up a bit. Then I want to give you the tip of a lifetime on the fightin' game. I'm your friend, boy; you had lots o' friends ten minutes ago; where are they now? Will you come?"

"I guess I'll come—I may as well; but I can't talk to-night," says he, and the heart-broken way he says it, poor kid, sounded just right to me.

"You ain't asked to talk," says I, "and not even to listen, to-night. Go get into your togs. I'll be after you soon."

IV

SO I took him home and laid him to by-by, and next mornin' when he woke physically right I let him have both barrels.

"Son," says I, "I've disqualified you for the championship and before you lies the career of an also-ran. I suppose you're wise to what that means—curtain-raisin', short money, punchin'-bag for others, and all that. Ten years from now, with luck, you may be holdin' a steady job as bouncer in Webfoot's saloon. Like the prospect? Well, then, I promised you a big tip on the fightin' game. Here it is: Cut it!

"You're just a kid, so you've got a chance to make good in a man's work. If you'd trimmed me you'd still have failed at the other. You're shy several of the ingredients of a winning pug. You ain't good enough at lyin', cheatin', stallin', snitchin' and that sort o' thing.

"A prize-fight is no kin to an Epworth League. You couldn't do a thing that made you ashamed to meet your mother's eye. Her heart's been breakin' ever since you got into this game, and I came straight from her to Corona, to break you before you could become a sure-enough fighter.

"Yes, I know her. And, say, Kid, what do you feel like when you think o' the grief you've caused her? Know the money you sent her out of your winnin's? She's got every dime of it; would beg before she'd use that kind o' money! Well, ain't you goin' back to her and get that sad look out o' her eye? Ain't there nothin' your head and hand can do that she'll be proud of?

"Then do it; it will pay you better than this game in self-respect, in contentment and in dollars and cents. That's all o' my spiel. Think it over. I'm leavin' for the depot now. The train leaves in half an hour. If you're willin' to cut this rotten game and be somebody, join me before train time; if muckin' still looks enticin' to you — why then the mule is yours."

"No," says the Kid, "I won't join you at the depot. I'll go with you now! We'll go back together."

But I couldn't be present at the reunion —lost my nerve. The closer we got to the city the colder my feet got, and soon as we got out o' the depot I faked some important business and beat it. It had come into my nut that whatever the widow might think o' the cure, she might not like the treatment.

And, come to think of it, knockin' a kid's block off ain't much of a bid for his mother's O. K. So I didn't get to my room till way after dark, and I tiptoed in then.

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BUT next mornin' when I thought she was gone to the skirt factory, she stopped me passing her door. As I turned to face the music, my heart hopped right up under my palate.

"Good mornin', Mr. Grant," says she.

"Mornin' ma'm," says I.

"Mr. Grant," says she, comin' up close and takin' both o' my hands in hers, "I want to thank you for what you have done for me and mine. I know what violence you did to your own sense of decency and right. I know how hard and bravely you fought, for Billie has told me; and it would be silly pretense in me not to say I know you did it for me. I do know it, and, much as I detest prize-fighting, I am proud of it and proud to know a man who can be a perfect hero and never once think he has been!"

There was tears—not sad tears either—runnin' down her cheeks.

"Widow," says I, not knowin' what I'm sayin' more than a jaybird, "I'd be pleased to do as much or more for you six times a week. 'Cause you are—yourself. Some day, when I've got a job and am goin' good, would you mind if I come and asked you to sign up as my manager for life?"

"Some day?" says she, laughin' and lookin' down. "Why, what is the delay for?"

KUT-LE OF *the* DESERT

BY HONORÉ WILLSIE

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE TRAIL AGAIN.

FOR a long time Rhoda sat silently considering her problem, and John watched her soberly. Finally she turned to speak. As she did she caught on the young man's face a look so weary, so puzzled, so altogether wretched that the girl's heart smote her. This was indeed a poor return for what he had endured for her! Rhoda jumped to her feet with resolution in her eyes.

"Are you too tired to explore the ruins?" she said.

DeWitt rose languidly. Rhoda had responded at once to rest and food, but John would need a month of care and quiet in which to regain his strength. "I'll do anything you want me to—in that line!"

Rhoda carefully ignored the last phrase.

"Even if we're half dead, it's too bad to miss the opportunity to examine such a

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wonderful thing as this. You couldn't find as glorious a setting for a ruin anywhere in Europe."

"Oh, yes, you could, lots of 'em," answered DeWitt. "You can't compare a ruin like this with anything in Europe. What makes European ruins appeal to us is not only their intrinsic beauty, but the association of big ideas with them. We know that big thoughts built them and perhaps destroyed them."

"What do you call big thoughts?" asked Rhoda. "Wasn't it just as great for these Pueblo Indians to perform such terrible labor in building this for their families as it was for some old king to work thousands of slaves to death to build him a monument?"

DeWitt laughed.

"Rhoda, you can love the desert, its Indians and its ruins all you want to, if you won't ask me to! I've had all I want of the three of them! Lord, how I hate it all!"

Rhoda looked at him wistfully. If only he could understand the spiritual change in her that was even greater than the physical! If only he could see the beauty of those far lavender hazes. If only he could understand how even now she was heart-sick for the night trail where one looked up into the sky as into a shadowy opal! If only he knew the peace that had dwelt with her on the holiday ledge where there were tints and beauties too deep for words! And yet with the wistfulness came a strange sense of satisfaction that all this new part of her must belong forever to Kut-le.

John led the way into the dwelling. All was emptiness and ruin. All that remained of the old life within its walls were wonderful bits of pottery. Only once did DeWitt give evidence of pleasure. He was examining the carefully finished walls of one of the rooms when he called:

"I say, Rhoda, just look at this bit of humanness!"

Rhoda came to him quickly and he pointed low down on the adobe wall where was the perfect imprint of a baby's hand.

"The little rascal got spanked, I'll bet, for putting his hand on the 'dobe before it was dry," commented John.

Rhoda smiled but said nothing. These departed peoples had become very real and very pitiable to her.

As soon as he could drag Rhoda from the ancient pots, John led the way to the top of the ruin. He was anxious to find whether there were more than the one trail leading from the desert. To his great satisfaction he found that the mesa was unscalable except at the point that Rhoda had found as she staggered up from the desert.

"I'm going to guard that trail to-night," he said. "It's just possible, you know, that Kut-le escaped from Porter, though I think if he had he would have been upon us long before this. I've been mighty careless. But my brain is so tired it seems to have been off duty. I could hold that single-handed from the upper terrace for a week."

"Just remember," said Rhoda quickly, "that I've asked you not to shoot to kill!"

Again the hard light gleamed in DeWitt's eyes.

"I shall have a few words with him first, then I shall shoot to kill. There is that between that Indian and me which a woman evidently can't understand. I just can't see why you take the stand you do!"

"John, dear," cried Rhoda, "put yourself in his place. With all the race prejudice against you that he had, wouldn't you have done as he has?"

"Probably," answered DeWitt calmly. "I also would have expected what he is going to get."

A sudden sense of the bizarre nature of their conversation caused Rhoda to say comically:

"I never knew that you could have such bloody ideas, John!"

DeWitt was glad to turn the conversation.

"I am so only occasionally," he said. "For instance, instead of shooting rabbits for supper, I'm going to try a figure 4 trap."

THEY returned to their little camp on the upper terrace, and Rhoda sat with wistful gray eyes fastened on the desert while John busied himself with the trap-making. He worked with the skill of his country boyhood and the trap was cleverly finished.

"It's evident that I'm not the leader of the expedition any more," said Rhoda, looking at the trap admiringly.

John shook his head.

"I've lost my faith in myself as a hero. It's one thing to read of the desert and think how well you could have managed there, and another thing to be on the spot!"

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The day passed slowly. As night drew on, the two on the mesa-top grew more and more anxious. There was little doubt that they could live for a number of days at the old pueblo, yet it was evident that the ruin was far from any traveled trail and that chances of discovery were slight except by Kut-le. On the other hand, they were absolutely unprepared for a walking trip across the desert. Troubled and uncertain what to do, they watched the wonder of the sunset. Deeper, richer, more divine grew the colors of the desert, and in one supreme, flaming glory the sun sank from view.

DeWitt, with his arm across Rhoda's shoulders, spoke anxiously,

"Don't you still think we'd better start to-morrow?"

"Yes," she answered, "I suppose so. What direction shall we take?"

"East," replied DeWitt. "We're bound to strike help if we can keep going long enough in one direction. We'll cook a good supply of rabbits and I'll fix up one of those bowl-like ollas with my handkerchief so we can carry water in it as well as in the two canteens. I think you had better sleep in the little room there to-night and I'll lie across the end of the trail here."

Rhoda sighed.

"I've nothing better to suggest. As you say, it's all guesswork!"

They set the rabbit-trap by the spring; then Rhoda, who had quite recovered from her nervousness of the night before, entered her little sleeping-room and made ready for the night. The front of the room had so crumbled away that she could see John's dark form by the trail and she lay down with a sense of security and fell asleep at once.

John paced the terrace for a long hour after Rhoda was asleep, trying to plan every detail for the morrow. He dared not confess even to himself how utterly disheartened he felt in the face of this terrible adversary, the desert. Finally, realizing that he must have rest if Rhoda was not to repeat her previous experience in leading him across the desert, he stretched himself on the ground across the head of the trail. He must trust to his nervousness to make him sleep lightly.

HOW long she had slept Rhoda did not know when she was awakened by a half-muffled oath from DeWitt. She jumped to her feet and ran out to the terrace. Never while life remained to her was she to forget what she saw there, by the light of the setting moon. DeWitt and Kut-le were wrestling in each other's grip. Rhoda stood horrified. As the two men twisted about, DeWitt saw the girl and panted:

"Don't stir, Rhoda! Don't call or you'll have his whole bunch up here!"

"Don't worry about that!" exclaimed Kut-le. "You've been wanting to get hold of me. Now we'll fight it out barehanded and the best man wins!"

Rhoda looked wildly down the trail, then ran up to the two men. "Stop!" she screamed. "Stop!" Then as she caught the look in the men's faces as they glared at each other she cried, "I hate you both, you beasts!"

Her screams carried far in the night air, and in a moment Cesca came panting up the trail. She lunged at DeWitt with cat-like fury, but at a sharp word from Kut-le she turned to Rhoda and stood guard beside the girl. Rhoda stood helplessly watching the battle as in a dream one watches the horrors of a nightmare.

Kut-le and DeWitt now were fighting as two wolves fight. Both the men were trained wrestlers, but in their fury all their scientific training was forgotten, and rolling over and over on the rocky trail each fought for a hold on the other's throat. With Kut-le was the advantage of perfect condition and superior strength.

But DeWitt was fighting for his stolen mate. He was fighting like a cave-man who has brooded for months on his revenge, and he was a terrible adversary. He had the sudden strength, the fearful recklessness of a madman. Now rolling on the edge of the terrace, now high against the crumbling pueblo, with no sound save grunts and hard breathing, the savage and the civilized creature dragged each other back and forth. And Rhoda, awed by this display of passions, stood like the First Woman and waited!

Of a sudden Kut-le disentangled himself and with knees on DeWitt's shoulders he reached for the white man's throat. At the same time DeWitt gathered together his recumbent body and with a mighty heave flung Kut-le over his head. Rhoda gave a little cry, thinking the fight was ended, but as Kut-le gained his feet DeWitt sprang to meet him and the struggle was renewed.

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Rhoda never had dreamed of a sight so sickening as this of the two men she knew so well fighting for each other's throats with the animal's lust for killing. She did not know what would be Kut-le's course if he gained the mastery, but as she caught glimpses of DeWitt's face with its clinched teeth and terrible look of loathing she knew that if his fingers ever reached Kut-le's throat the Indian could hope for no mercy.

And then she saw DeWitt's face go white and his head drop back.

"Oh!" she screamed, "you've killed him! You've killed him!"

The Indian's voice came in jerks as he eased DeWitt to the ground.

"He's just fainted. He's put up a tremendous fight for a man in his condition!"

As he spoke, he was tying DeWitt's hands and ankles with his own and DeWitt's handkerchiefs. Rhoda would have run to DeWitt's aid, but Cesca's hand was tight on her arm. Before the girl could plan any action, Kut-le had turned to her and had lifted her in his arms. She fought him wildly.

"I can't leave him so, Kut-le! You will kill all I've learned to feel for you if you leave him so!"

"He'll be all right!" panted Kut-le, running down the trail. "I've got Billy Porter down here to leave with him!"

At the foot of the trail were horses. Gagged and bound to his saddle, Billy Porter sat in the faint starlight with Molly on guard. Kut-le quickly pulled Porter to the ground, where the man sat helpless, and put Rhoda in his place.

"Oh, Billy!" cried Rhoda. "John is on the terrace! Find him! Help him!"

The last words were spoken as Kut-le turned her horse and led at a trot into the desert.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE STRUGGLE

RHODA was so confused that for a moment she could only ease herself to the pony's swift canter and wonder whether her encounter with DeWitt had been but a dream after all. A short distance from the pueblo Kut-le rode in beside her. It was very dark now with the heavy blackness that just precedes the dawn, but Rhoda felt that the Indian was looking at her exultingly.

"It seemed as if I never would get Alchise and Injun Tom moved to a friend's *campos* so that I could overtake you. I will say that that fellow Porter is game to the finish. It took me an hour to subdue him! Now don't worry about the two of them. With a little work they can loose themselves and help each other to safety. I saw Newman's trail ten miles or so over beyond the pueblo mesa and I told Porter just how to go to pick him up."

Rhoda laughed hysterically.

"No wonder you have such a hold on your Indians! You seem never to fail! I do believe as much of it is luck as ingenuity!"

Kut-le chuckled.

"What a jolt DeWitt will find when he comes to, and finds Porter!"

"You needn't gloat over the situation, Kut-le!" exclaimed Rhoda, half sobbing in her conflict of emotions.

"Oh, you mustn't mind anything I say," returned the young Indian. "I am crazy with joy at just hearing your voice again! Are you really sorry to be with me again? Did DeWitt mean as much to you as ever? Tell me, Rhoda! Say just one kindly thing to me!"

"Oh, Kut-le!" cried Rhoda, "I can't! I can't! You must help me to be strong—you, who are the strongest person I know. Can't you put yourself in my place and realize what a horrible position I am in!"

Kut-le answered slowly,

"I think I can realize it. But the end is so great, so much worth while, that nothing matters much to me. Rhoda, isn't this good—the lift of the horse under your knees—the air rushing past your face—the weave and twist of the trail—don't they speak to you and doesn't your heart answer?"

"Yes," answered Rhoda simply.

The young man rode still closer. Dawn was lifting now and with a gasp Rhoda saw what on the terrace she had been too agonized to notice. Kut-le was clothed again! He wore the khaki suit, the high laced riding boots of his ranch days and he wore them with the grace, the debonair ease that had so charmed Rhoda in young Cartwell. That little sense of his difference that had persisted in Rhoda's consciousness disappeared.

She stared at his broad, graceful shoulders, at the fine outline of his head which still was bare, and she knew that her deci-

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sion was going to be indescribably hard to keep. Kut-le watched the wistful gray eyes tenderly as if he realized the depth of the anguish behind their wistfulness, yet he watched none the less resolutely, as if he had no qualms over the outcome of his plans. And Rhoda, returning his gaze, caught the depth and splendor of his eyes. That wordless joy of life whose thrill had touched her the first time that she had met young Cartwell rushed through her veins once more. He was the youth, the splendor, the vivid wholesomeness of the desert!

Kut-le laid his hand on hers.

"Rhoda," softly, "do you remember the moment before Porter interrupted us? Dear one, you will have to prove much to take the truth of that moment from us! How much longer must I wait for you, Rhoda?"

Rhoda did not speak, but as she returned the young man's gaze there came her rare slow smile of unspeakable beauty and tenderness. Kut-le trembled, but before he could speak Rhoda seemed to see, between his face and hers, DeWitt, haggard and exhausted, expending the last remnant of his strength in his fight for her. She put her hands before her face with a little sob.

Kut-le watched her in silence for a moment, then he said in his low, rich voice:

"Neither DeWitt nor I want you to suffer over your decision. And DeWitt doesn't want just the shell of you. I have the real you! Oh, Rhoda, the real you will belong to me if you are seven times DeWitt's wife! Can't you realize that for ever and ever you are mine, no matter how you fight or what you do?"

But Rhoda scarcely heard him. She was with DeWitt, struggling across the parching sands.

"Oh, Kut-le! Kut-le! What shall I do! What shall I do!"

Kut-le started to answer, then changed his mind.

"You poor tired little girl!" he said. "You must have had a fierce time there in the desert. You look exhausted. What did you have to eat, and how did you make out crossing to the mesa? By your trail you went miles out of your way."

Rhoda struggled for calm.

"We nearly died the first day," she said. "But we did very well after we reached the mesa."

Kut-le smiled to himself. It was hard even for him to realize that this plucky girl who passed so simply over such an ordeal as he knew she must have endured could be the Rhoda of the ranch. But he said only:

"We'll make for the timber-line and let you rest for a while."

AT MID-MORNING they left the desert and began to climb a rough mountain slope. At the *piñon* line Kut-le called a halt. Never before had shade seemed so good to Rhoda as it did now. She lay on the pine-needles looking up into the soft green. It was unspeakably grateful to her eyes which had been so long tortured by the desert glare. She lay thus for a long time, her mental pain for a time lost in the access of physical comfort. Shortly Molly, who had been working rapidly, brought her a steaming bowl of stew. Rhoda ate this, then with her head pillowed on her arm she fell asleep.

She was wakened by Molly's touch on her arm. It was late afternoon. Rhoda looked up into the squaw's face and drew a quick, hard breath as realization came to her.

"Molly! Molly!" she cried; "I'm in terrible, terrible trouble, Molly!"

The squaw looked worried.

"You no go away! Kut-le heap sorry while you gone!"

But Rhoda scarcely heeded the woman's voice. She rolled over with her hot face in the fragrant needles and groaned.

"Oh, Molly! Molly! I'm in terrible trouble!"

"What trouble? You tell old Molly."

Rhoda sat up and stared into the deep brown eyes. Just as Kut-le had become to her the splendor of the desert, so had Molly become the brooding wisdom of the desert. With sudden inspiration she grasped the Indian woman's toil-scarred hands:

"Listen, Molly! Before I knew Kut-le I was going to marry the white man, DeWitt. And after Kut-le stole me I hated Kut-le and I hated the desert. And now, oh, Molly, I love both Kutle and the desert and I must marry the white man!"

"Why? You tell Molly why?"

"Because he is white, Molly, like me. Because he loves me so and has done so much for me! But most of all because he is white."

Molly scowled.

"Because Kut-le is Injun, you no marry him?"

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Rhoda nodded miserably.

"Huh! And you think you so big, Kut-le so big, that Great Spirit care if you marry white, marry Injun? All Great Spirit care is for every squaw to have papoose. Squaw, she big fool to listen to her head. Squaw, she must always listen to her heart, that is Great Spirit talking. Your heart it say, marry Kut-le!"

Molly paused and looked at the girl who sat with stormy eyes on the sinking sun. And she forgot her hard-earned wisdom and was just a heart-hungry woman.

"You stay! Stay with Kut-le and old Molly! You so sweet! You like little childs! You lie in old Molly heart like little girl papoose that never came to Molly. You stay! Always, always, Molly will take care of you."

Rhoda was deeply touched. To her it was the cry of the famished motherhood of a dying race. She put her soft cheek on Molly's shoulder and she could no longer see the sun, for her eyes were tear-blinded. Kut-le, standing on the other side of the camp, looked at the picture with deepening eyes, then he crossed and put his hand on Rhoda's shoulder.

"Dear one," he said, "you must eat your supper, then we must take the trail."

Rhoda looked up into the young man's face. She was exquisite in the failing light. For a moment it seemed as if Kut-le must fold her in his arms, but something in her troubled gaze withheld him and he only smiled at her caressingly.

"Before you eat," he said, "come to the edge of the camp and look through the glasses."

Rhoda hurried after him, and stared out over the desert. A short distance out, vivid in the afterglow, moved two figures. She distinguished the short, wiry figure of Porter, the gaunt figure of DeWitt, walking with determined strides. Waiting till she could command her voice, Rhoda turned to Kut-le, who was watching her keenly.

"Will they pick up our trail? Are the poor things badly lost?"

"Billy Porter lost! I guess not! And I gave him enough hints so that he ought to join Newman in another twenty-four hours."

Rhoda smiled wanly.

"Sometimes you forget to act like a cold-blooded Indian."

Kut-le gave his familiar chuckle.

"Well, you see I've been contaminated by my long association with the whites!"

CHAPTER XXXV

THE RUINED MISSION

AND so again the nights of going. During her waking hours Rhoda spent the great part of her time considering arguments that would have weight with Kut-le when the struggle came which she knew was imminent.

If she had suffered before, if the early part of her abduction had been agony, it had been nothing in comparison with what she was enduring in putting Kut-le aside for DeWitt. And after all, she had no final guide in holding to her resolution save an instinct that told her that her course was the right one.

All the arguments that she could put into words against inter-race marriage seemed inadequate. This instinct which was wordless and formless alone remained sufficient.

And, with the ill logic of womankind, through all her arguing with herself there flushed one glad thought. Kut-le knew that she loved him, knew that she was suffering in the thought of giving him up! His tender, half-sad, half-triumphant smile proved that as did his protective air of ownership.

Rhoda noticed one condition of her keeping to her decision. She was very firm in it at night when the desert was dim. But in the glory of the dawns and the sunsets her little arguments seemed strangely small. Sitting on a mountainside one afternoon, Rhoda watched a rain-storm sweep across the ranges, across the desert to the far-lying mesas.

Normally odorless, the desert after the rain emitted a faint, ineffable odor that teased the girl's fancy as if she verged on the very secret of the desert's beauty. Exquisite violet mists rolled back to the mountains. Flashing every rainbow tint from its moistened breast, the desert lay as if breathing the very words of the Great Scheme.

Suddenly to Rhoda her resolution seemed small and futile, and for a long hour she reveled in the thought of belonging to the man she loved. And yet as night descended and the infinite reaches of the desert receded into darkness, the spell was broken and the old doubts and misery returned.

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The holiday aspect of the flight was gone. Kut-le moved with a grim determination that was not to be misinterpreted. Rhoda knew that they were to reach the Mexican border with all possible speed. The young Indian drove the little party to the limit of its endurance. Rhoda avoided talking to him as much as she could, and Kut-le, seeming to understand her mood, left her much to herself.

On the fourth day they camped on a canyon edge. After Rhoda had eaten, she walked with Kut-le to the far edge and looked down. The canyon was very deep and narrow. Some distance away, near where it opened on the desert, lay a group of buildings that seemed partly in ruins.

"Is that another pueblo?" asked Rhoda.

"No, it's an old monastery. Part of the year they have a padre there. I wish I knew if there was one there now."

"Why?" asked Rhoda suspiciously.

"Don't bother your dear head," answered Kut-le. Then he went on as if half to himself. "There's been an awful lot of fooling on this expedition. Perhaps I ought to have made for the Mexican border the very night I took you." He looked at Rhoda's wide, troubled eyes. "But no, then I would have missed this wonderful desert growth of yours! But now we are going straight over the border where I know a padre that will marry us. Then we will make for Europe at once."

The morning sun glinted on the pine-needles. Old Molly hummed a singsong air over the stew-pot. And Rhoda stood with stormy, tear-dimmed eyes and quivering lips.

"It can never, never be, Kut-le!"

"Why not?"

"We can't solve the problems of race adjustment. No love is big enough for that. I have been civilized a thousand years. You have been savage a thousand years. You can't come forward. I can't go backward."

"You know well enough, Rhoda," said Kut-le quietly, "that I am civilized."

"You are externally, perhaps," said the girl. "But you have no proof that at heart you are not as uncivilized as your father or grandfather. Your stealing me shows that. Nothing can change our instincts. You know that you may revert any time."

Kut-le turned on her fiercely.

"Do you love me, Rhoda?"

Rhoda stood silently, her cleft chin trembling, her deep gray eyes wide and grief stricken.

"Do you love me, and better than you do DeWitt?" insisted the man.

Suddenly Rhoda lifted her head proudly.

"Yes! I do love you better than any one in the world, but I can not marry you!"

Kut-le took her trembling hands in his.

"Dear one, why not?" he asked.

Still the sun flickered on the pine-needles and still Molly hummed over her stew-pot. Still Rhoda stood looking into the eyes of the man she loved, her scarlet cheeks growing each moment more richly crimson.

"Because you are an Indian."

Kut-le's mouth closed in the old way.

"And still you shall marry me, Rhoda!"

"I am a white woman, Kut-le. I can't marry an Indian. The difference is too great!"

KUT-LE turned abruptly and walked to the canyon edge, looking far out over the desert. Rhoda watched him, half hysterically. The moment that she had so dreaded had arrived and she found herself, after all her planning, utterly unprepared to meet it.

It seemed a long time that Kut-le stood staring away from her. At last Rhoda could bear the silence no longer. She ran to him and put her shaking hand on his arm. He turned his stern young face to her and her heart failed her.

"Oh, Kut-le! Kut-le!" she cried. "If you won't help me to do right, who will? It's not right for us to marry! Just not right! That's all I know about it!"

Kut-le put both hands on her shoulders.

"Look here, Rhoda. What you call the 'right' instinct is just the remnant of the old man-made race hatred in you. It's just a part of the old conceit of the Caucasian."

Rhoda stirred restlessly, but Kut-le held her firmly and went on.

"I tell you if we're not to go mad, we've got to believe that great things come to us for a purpose. There is no human being who has loved who does not believe that love is the greatest thing that has been given to man. The man who has loved knows that the biggest things in the world have been done for the love of woman. Love is bigger than nations or races. It's *human!* It's above all we can do to tarnish

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it with our little prejudices. When it comes greatly, it comes supremely."

He lifted the girl's face and looked deeply into her eyes.

"Rhoda, if it has come as greatly to you as it has to me, you will not pause for any sorrow that coming to me may cost you. You will come, in spite of everything. I believe that if, in your smallness and ignorance, you refuse this gift that has come to you and me, you will be outraging the greatest force in nature."

Rhoda stood sorrow-stricken and confused. When the deep, quiet voice ceased, she said piteously:

"I haven't lived in the desert as long as you. The way does not lie so clear to me. If only I had your conviction, I too could be strong and walk the path I saw unhesitatingly. But I see no path!"

"Then," said Kut-le, "because I see, I'll decide for you! Oh, Rhoda, you must have faith in me! I have had you in my power and I have kept the faith with you. I am going to take you and marry you! I am going to make this gift that has come to you and me make us the big man and woman that nature needs. To-night we shall reach the padre who will marry us."

He watched the girl keenly for a moment, then he again turned from her deliberately and walked to the edge of the canyon as if he wanted her to come to her final decision unbiased by his nearness. But he turned back to her with a curious expression on his face.

"Come and take a good-by look, Rhoda! Your friends are below. I hope it will be some time before we see them again!"

Rhoda went to him. Far, far below she saw little dots of men making camp beyond the monastery near the desert. Suddenly Rhoda sank to her knees with a cry of longing that was heart-breaking.

"Oh, my people! My own people!" she sobbed, crouching upon the canyon edge.

Kut-le watched the little figure with inscrutable eyes. Then he lifted the girl to her feet.

"Rhoda, are you going to eat your heart out for your own kind if you marry me? Won't I be sufficient? It hadn't occurred to me that I might not be!"

"You haven't given up your people," answered Rhoda. "You are always going back to them."

"But you aren't really giving them up," urged Kut-le. "It really is I who make the sacrifice of my race!"

"And that is the reason for one of my fears," cried Rhoda. "I am afraid that some day you would find the price too great and that our marriage would be wrecked."

"Even if I went back for a few months' hunt each year, would that make you unhappy?" asked Kut-le.

"Kut-le!" exclaimed Rhoda. "I am not talking of externals. I mean that if your longing for your own kind made you lose your love for me. Oh, I can't see any of it straight, but I am afraid!"

"Nonsense, Rhoda! I fought that battle long before I knew you. There is absolutely no danger of my reverting. I am going to spend the rest of my life among the whites even if you shouldn't marry me. Rhoda! Rhoda! I wish I had had time to let you grow to it fully!"

Rhoda stood rigidly. Molly, sensing trouble, hovered restlessly just out of earshot.

"If you married DeWitt," Kut-le went on, "could you forget me? Forget the desert? Forget our days and nights? Forget my arms about you?"

"Oh, no! no!" cried Rhoda. "You know that I shall love you always!"

"And will DeWitt want what you offer him?" Kut-le went on mercilessly.

Rhoda winced.

"I wish," said Kut-le huskily—"you never will know how I wish—that you had come to me freely, feeling that the sacrifice was worth while!"

Rhoda looked at him wonderingly. After all the weeks of iron determination, was the young giant weakening, was his great heart failing him?

"I had thought," he went on, "that you were big enough to stand the test. That after the travail and the heart-scourging you would see, and would come to me freely, strong enough to smile at all your regrets and fears. That thought steeled me to put you through the torture. But if now at the end you are coming to me only because you must! Rhoda, I don't want you on those terms."

Rhoda gasped. She felt as one feels when in a dream one falls an unexpected and endless distance. The relief from the pressure of Kut-le's will that had forced her on for so long, left her weak and aimless.

Yet somehow she found the strength to say:

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"Kut-le, we must give each other up! I love you so that I can let you go! Oh, can't you see how I feel about it?"

AGAIN Kut-le looked far off over vista of mountains and canyon. His eyes were deep and abstracted, as if he saw into the years ahead with knowledge denied to Rhoda. Then he turned to Rhoda and searched her face with burning gaze. He eyed her hair, her lovely heart-broken face, her slender figure. For a moment his face was tortured by a look of doubt that was heart-shattering. He lifted Rhoda across his chest in the old way and held her to him with passionate tenderness. He laid his face against hers and she heard him whisper:

"Oh, my love! Love of my youth and my manhood!" Then he set her very gently on her feet. "Don't cry," he said, "I can't bear it!"

Rhoda threw her arms above her head in an abandonment of agony.

"Oh, I can not, can not bear this!" Then she added more calmly, "I suffer as much as you, Kut-le!"

Again the look of unspeakable grief crossed the young Indian's face, but it immediately became inscrutable. He led Rhoda along the canyon edge.

"Do you see that little trail going down?" he said.

"Yes!" said Rhoda wonderingly.

"Then go!" said Kut-le quietly.

Rhoda looked up at him blankly.

"Go!" he said sternly. "Go back to your own kind and I will go on alone. Don't stop to talk any more. Go now!"

Rhoda turned and looked at Cesca squatting by the horses, at Molly hovering near by with anxious eyes. Never to make the dawn camp again—never to hear Molly humming over the stew-pot! Suddenly Rhoda felt that if she could have Molly with her she would not be so utterly separated from Kut-le.

"Let Molly go with me!" she said. "I love Molly!"

"No!" said Kut-le. "You are to forget the desert and the Indians. Go now!"

With awe and grief too deep for words Rhoda obeyed the young chief's stern eyes. She clambered down the rough trail to a break in the canyon wall, then, clinging with hands and feet, down the sheer side. The tall figure, beautiful in its perfect symmetry, stood immovable, the face never turning from her. Rhoda knew that she never was to forget this picture of him. At the foot of the canyon wall she stood long, looking up. Far, far above, the straight figure stood in lonely majesty gazing at the life for which he had sacrificed so much. Rhoda looked until, tear-blinded, she turned away.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE END OF THE TRAIL

THE canyon was sandy and rough. Rhoda could see the monastery set among olive-trees. Beyond this, where the canyon opened to the desert, she knew that the white men's camp lay, though she could not see it.

She had no fear of losing her way with the canyon walls hemming her in. She still was sobbing softly to herself as she started along the foot of the wall. She tramped steadily for a time, then she stopped abruptly. She would not go on! The sacrifice was too much. She looked back to the canyon top. Kut-le had disappeared. Already he must be only a memory to her!

Then of a sudden, Rhoda felt a sense of shame that her strength of purpose should be so much less than the Indian's. At least she could carry in her heart forever the example of his fortitude. It would be like his warm hand guiding and lifting her through the hard days and years to come. Strangely comforted and strengthened by this thought, Rhoda started on through the familiar wilderness of the desert.

This, she thought, was her last moment alone in the desert, for without Kut-le she never would return to it. She watched the gray-green cactus against the painted rock heaps. She watched the brown tortured crest of the canyon against the violet sky. She watched the melting haze above the monastery, the buzzards sliding through the motionless air, the far multi-colored ranges, as if she would etch forever on her memory the world that Kut-le loved. And she knew that, let her body wander where it must, her spirit would forever belong to the desert.

Rhoda passed the monastery, where she thought she saw men among the olive-trees. But she did not stop. She gradually worked

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out into an easy trail that led toward the open desert.

The little camp at the canyon's mouth was preparing to move when Jack Newman jumped excitedly to his feet. Coming toward them through the sand was a boyish figure that moved with a beautiful stride, tireless and swift. As the newcomer drew nearer they saw that she was erect and lithe, slender but full-chested, and that her face——

"Rhoda!" shouted John DeWitt.

In a moment Jack was grasping one of her hands and John the other, while Billy Porter and Carlos shook each other's hands excitedly.

"Gee whiz!" cried Jack. "John said you were in superb condition, but I didn't realize that it meant this! Why, Rhoda, if it wasn't for your hair and eyes and the dimple in your chin, I wouldn't know you!"

"Are you all right?" asked DeWitt anxiously. "Where in the world did you come from? Where have you been?"

"Were you hurt much in the fight?" cried Rhoda. "Oh!" looking about at the eager listeners, "that was the most awful thing I ever saw, that fight! And Billy Porter, you are all right, I see. How shall I ever repay you all for what you have done for me?"

"Gosh!" exclaimed Porter. "I'm repaid just by looking at you! If that pison Piute hasn't made monkeys of us all, I'd like to know who has! How did you get away from him?"

"He let me go," answered Rhoda simply.

The men gasped.

"What was the matter with him?" ejaculated Porter. "Was he sick or dying?"

"No," said Rhoda mechanically, "I guess he saw that it was useless."

"And he dropped you in the desert without water or food or horse!" cried DeWitt. "Oh, that Apache cur!"

"No! No!" exclaimed Rhoda. "He dropped me not far from here. We saw the camp and he sent me to it."

The men looked at each other incredulously. Jack Newman's face was puzzled. He knew Kut-le and it was hard to believe that he would give up what he already had won. DeWitt spoke excitedly:

"Then he's still within our reach! Hurry up, friends!"

Rhoda turned swiftly to the gaunt-faced man. Then she spoke very distinctly with that in her deep gray eyes that stirred each listener with a vague sense of loss and yearning:

"I don't want Kut-le harmed. I sha'n't tell you anything that will help you locate him. He did me no harm. On the contrary, he made me a well woman, physically and mentally. If I can forgive his effrontery in stealing me, surely you all will grant me this favor to top all that you have done for me."

PORTER'S under lip protruded with the old obstinate look.

"That fellow's got to be made an example of, Miss Rhoda," he said. "No white that's a man can stand for what he's done. He's bound to be hunted down, you know. If we don't, others will!"

Rhoda turned impatiently to DeWitt.

"John, after all our talk, you must understand! *You* know what good Kut-le has done me and how big it was of him to let me go. Make them promise to let him alone!"

But there was no answering look of understanding in DeWitt's worn face.

"Rhoda, you haven't any idea what you're asking! It isn't a question of forgiveness! You don't get the point of view that you ought! Why, the whole country is worked up over this thing! The newspapers are full of it. Just as Porter says, the Apache's got to be made an example of. We will hunt him down if it takes a year!"

So far Jack Newman had said nothing. Rhoda looked at him as if he were her last hope.

"Oh, Jack!" she cried. "He was your friend, your dearest friend! And he sent me back! Why, you never would have got me if he hadn't voluntarily let me go! He is wonderful on the trail!"

"So we found!" said DeWitt grimly.

But Rhoda was watching Jack.

"Rhoda," Jack said at last, "I know how you feel! I know what a bully chap Kut-le is. This just about does me up! But what he's done can't be let go. We've got to punish him!"

"'Punish him!'" repeated Rhoda. "Just what do you mean by that?"

"We mean," answered DeWitt, "that when we find him, I'll shoot him!"

"No!" cried Rhoda. "No! Why, he *sent me back!*"

The three men looked at Rhoda uncom-

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fortably and at each other wonderingly. A woman's magnanimity is never to be understood by a man.

"Are you tired, Rhoda?" asked DeWitt abruptly. "Do you feel able to take to the saddle at once?"

"I'm all right!" exclaimed Rhoda impatiently. "What are your plans?"

DeWitt pointed out across the sand to the canyon wall. A line of slender footprints led through the level wastes as plainly as if on new fallen snow.

"We will follow your trail," he said.

There was silence for an instant in the little camp while the men eyed the girlish face, flushed and vivid beneath the tan. As it had come when DeWitt had rescued her, the old sense of the appalling nature of her experience was returning to her again. With sickening clarity she was getting the men's view-point. The old Rhoda would have protested, would have fought desperately and blindly. The new Rhoda had lived through hours of hopeless battle with circumstance. She had learned the desert's lesson of patience.

"I have thought," she said slowly, "so much of the joy of my return to you! God only knows how the picture of it has kept me alive from day to day. All *your* joy seems swallowed up in your thirst for revenge. All right, my friends. Only, wherever you go, I go too."

Billy Porter shook his head with a muttered, "Gosh!" as if the ways of women were quite beyond him.

"I think you had better ride on to the ranch with Carlos," said DeWitt, "while we take up Kut-le's trail. This will be no trip for a woman."

"You're foolish!" exclaimed Jack. "We'll not let her out of our sight again. You can't tell what stunt Kut-le is up to!"

"That's right!" said Porter. "It'll be hard on her, but she'd better come with us."

"Don't trouble to discuss the matter," said Rhoda coolly. "I am coming with you. Katherine probably sent some clothing for me, didn't she?"

"Why, yes!" exclaimed Jack. "That was one of the first things she thought of. She sent her own riding things for you. She spoke of the little silk dress you had on and said you hadn't anything appropriate in your trunks for the rough trip you might have to take after we found you."

Jack was talking rapidly as if to relieve the tension of the situation. He undid a pack that he had kept tied to his saddle during all the long weeks of pursuit.

"We can rig up a dressing-room of blankets in no time," he went on, putting a bundle into Rhoda's hands.

RHODA stood holding the bundle in silence while all hands set to rigging up her dressing-room. She felt suddenly cool-headed and resourceful. Her mind was forced away from her own sorrow to the solution of another heavy problem. In the little blanket tent she unrolled the bundle and smiled tenderly at the evidence of Katherine's thoughtfulness. There were underwear, handkerchiefs, toilet-articles and Katherine's own pretty corduroy divided skirt and Norfolk jacket with a little blouse and Ascot scarf.

Rhoda took off her buckskins and tattered blue shirt slowly, with lips that would quiver. This was the last, the very last of Kut-le! She dressed herself in Katherine's clothes, then folded up the buckskins and shirt. She would keep them—always! When she came out from the tent she stepped awkwardly, for the skirts bothered her, and Jack, waiting near by, smiled at her. At another time Rhoda would have joined in his amusement, but now she asked soberly:

"Which horse is for me?"

"Rhoda!" cried DeWitt, "I really wouldn't know you! I thought I never could want you anything but ethereal, but —Jack, isn't she wonderful!"

Jack grinned. Rhoda, tanned and oval-cheeked and straight of back and shoulder, was not to be compared with the invalid Rhoda.

"Gee!" he said. "Wait till Katherine sees her!"

Rhoda shrugged her shoulders.

"My pleasure in all that is swallowed up by this savage obsession of yours."

John DeWitt led out Rhoda's pony.

"You don't understand, dear," he said. "You *can't* doubt my heavenly joy at having you safe. But the outrage of it all—that Apache devil!"

"I do understand, John," answered Rhoda wearily. "Don't try to explain again. I know just how you all feel. Only, I will not have Kut-le killed!"

"Rhoda," said DeWitt hoarsely, "I shall kill him as I would a yellow dog!"

Rhoda turned away. The line of march

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was quickly formed. Porter led. Carlos closed the rear. DeWitt and Newman rode on either side of Rhoda. They were not long in reaching the trail down the canyon wall. Here they paused, for the rough ascent was impossible for the horses. The men looked questioningly at Rhoda, but she volunteered no information. She believed that Kut-le had left the camp at the top long since. If for any reason he had delayed his going, she knew that he had watched every movement in the white camp and could protect himself easily.

"We can leave Carlos with the horses," said Porter, "while we climb up and see where the trail leads."

Rhoda dismounted, still silent, and followed Porter and DeWitt up the trail, Jack following her. The trail had been difficult to descend and was very hard to ascend. There was a dumb purposefulness about the men's movements that sickened Rhoda. She had seen too much of men in this mood of late and she feared them. She knew that all the amenities of civilization had been stripped from them and that she was only pitting her feeble strength against a world-old instinct.

Her heart was beating heavily as they neared the top, but not from the hard climb. She was enured to difficult trails. There was a sheer pull, shoulder high, at the top. The four accomplished it in one breathless group, then stood as if paralyzed.

Sunlight flickered through the pines. Molly and Cesca prepared the trail packs. And Kut-le sat beside the spring, eying his visitors grimly. He looked very cool and well groomed in comparison with his trail-worn adversaries.

DeWitt pulled out his Colt.

"I think I have you, this time!" he said.

"Yes?" asked Kut-le, without stirring. "And what are you going to do with me?"

"I'm going to take about a minute to tell you what I think of you and give you another minute in which to offer up some sort of an Indian prayer. Then I'm going to shoot you!"

Kut-le glanced from DeWitt to Rhoda, thence to Porter and Newman. Porter's under lip protruded. Jack looked sick. Both the men had their hands on their guns. Rhoda moistened her lips to speak, but Kut-le was before her.

"Are you a good shot, DeWitt?" he asked. "Because I know that Jack and Porter are sure in their aim. Let them shoot."

"You'll never know whether I am or not," replied DeWitt. "You'd better be thankful that we are shooting you instead of hanging you as you deserve, you cur! You'd better be glad you're dying. You haven't a white friend left in the country. All your ambition and hard work have come to this because you couldn't change your Indian hide after all. Now, then, say your prayers. Rhoda, cover up your eyes!"

KUT-LE rose slowly. The whites noticed with a little pang of shame that he made no attempt to touch his gun which lay on the ground beside him.

"You'd better let Jack and Billy shoot with you," he said quietly. "You won't like to think about the shot that killed me, afterward. It isn't nice, I've heard, the memory of killing a man."

"I'm shooting an Indian, not a man," said DeWitt. "Say your prayers!"

The spell of fear that had paralyzed Rhoda snapped. Before Jack or Billy could detain her she ran to DeWitt's side and grasped his arm.

"John! John! Listen to me, one moment! Look at me! In spite of all, look, see what he's made of me for you to reap the harvest! Look at me! I beg of you, do not shoot him! Let him go! Make him promise to leave the country. Make him promise anything. He keeps promises because he is an Indian! But if you have any love for me, if you care anything for my happiness, don't kill Kut-le! I tell you I will never marry you with his blood on your hands!"

A look curiously hard, curiously suspicious, came to DeWitt's eyes. Without lowering his gun or looking at the girl, he answered.

"You plead too well, Rhoda! I want this Indian to pay for more torture of mine than you can dream of! Get back out of the way! Are you ready, Kut-le?"

Rhoda's slender body was rigid. She moved away from DeWitt until she could encompass the four men in her glance. With arms folded across her arching chest she spoke with a richness in her voice that none of her hearers ever was to forget.

"Remember, friends, you have forced me to this! You had me safe, but you thought more of revenge than you did of my safety! John, if you kill Kut-le you will kill the

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man that I love with all the passion of my soul!"

DeWitt gasped as if he had been struck. Newman and Porter stared dizzily. Only Kut-le stood composed. His eyes with the old look of tragic tenderness were fastened on the girl.

"Are you going to shoot him now, John?"

"Rhoda!" cried DeWitt fiercely. "Rhoda! Do you realize what you are saying?"

"Yes," said Rhoda steadily. "I realize that a force greater than race pride, greater than self-love, greater than intellect or fear, is gripping me! John, I love this man! He and I have lived through experiences together too great for words. He had me in the hollow of his hand, but he sent me back to you, his enemy. You say that you love me. But you would not listen to my pleading, you would not grant me the only favor I ever asked you and the granting of which could not have harmed you."

Her listeners did not stir. Rhoda moistened her lips.

"Kut-le — think what he sacrificed for me. He gave up his dearest friendships. He gave up his honor and his country and risked his life for me. And then, when he thought the sacrifice would prove too great on my part, he gave me up! I ask you to give him his life, for me. Because, John, and Billy Porter, and Jack, I tell you that I love him!"

"My God!" panted DeWitt. "Rhoda, don't! You don't know what you're saying—Rhoda!"

Rhoda looked off where the afternoon sun lay like the very glory of God upon the chaos of range and desert. Almost—almost the secret of life itself seemed to bare itself to the girl's wide eyes. The white men watched her aghast. There was a desperate, hunted look in DeWitt's tired face. Rhoda turned back.

"I know what I'm saying," she replied. "But I tell you that this thing is bigger than I am. I have fought it, defied it, ignored it. It only grows the stronger! I know that this comes to humans but rarely. Yet it has come to me! It is the greatest force in the world. It is what makes life persist. To most people it comes only in small degree and they call that love! To me, in this boundless country, it has come boundlessly. It is greater than what you know as love. It is greater than I am. I don't know what sorrow or what joy my decision may bring me, but—John, I want you to let Kut-le live that I may marry him!"

DeWitt's arm dropped as if dead.

"Rhoda," he repeated agonizedly, "you don't know what you are saying!"

"Don't I?" asked Rhoda steadily. "Have I fought my fight without coming to know the risk? Don't I know what atavism means and race alienation and hunger for my own? But this which has come to me is stronger than all these. I love Kut-le, John, and I ask you to give his life to me!"

Still Kut-le stood motionless, as did Jack and Porter. DeWitt, without taking his eyes from Rhoda's, slowly, very slowly, slipped his Colt back into his belt. For a long moment he gazed at the wonder of the girl's exalted face. Then he passed his hands across his eyes.

"I give up!" he said quietly.

Then he turned, walked slowly to the canyon edge and clambered deliberately down the trail.

CHAPTER XXXVII

INTO THE DESERT SUNSET

JACK and Billy stood dazed for a moment longer, then Porter cleared his throat.

"Miss Rhoda, don't do this! Now don't you! Come with us back to the ranch. Just for a month, till you get away from this Injun's influence! Come back and talk to Mrs. Newman. Come back and get some other woman's ideas! For God's sake, Miss Rhoda, don't ruin your life this way!"

"When Katherine knows it all, she'll understand and agree with me," replied Rhoda. "Jack, try to remember everything I said to tell Katherine."

"*I* tell her!" cried Jack. "Why can't you tell her yourself? What are you planning to do?"

"There is a padre down there in the monastery," said Kut-le suddenly.

"But for heaven's sake," cried Jack, "come back to the ranch and have a decent wedding! Katherine will half kill me if I leave you this way!"

Porter turned on Jack savagely.

"Look here!" he shouted. "Are you crazy, too! You're talking about her *marrying* this Apache!"

Jack spoke through his teeth obstinately:

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"I've sweated blood over this thing as long as I propose to! If Rhoda wants to marry Kut-le, that's her business. I always did like Kut-le and I always shall. I've done my full duty in trying to get Rhoda back. Now that she says she cares for him, it's neither your nor my business, nor DeWitt's. But I want them to come back to the ranch with me and let Katherine give them a nice wedding."

"But—but—" spluttered Porter. Then he stopped as the good sense of Jack's attitude suddenly came home to him. "All right," he said sullenly. "I'm like DeWitt. I pass. Only—if you try to take this Injun back to the ranch, he'll never get there alive. He'll be lynched by the first bunch of cowboys or miners we strike. Miss Rhoda, even you can't stop 'em. You want to remember how the whole country is worked up over this!"

Rhoda whitened.

"Do you think that, too, Jack and Kut-le?"

For the first time Jack spoke to Kut-le.

"What do you think, Kut-le?" he said.

"Porter's right, of course," answered Kut-le. "My plan always has been to slip down into Mexico and then go to Paris for a year or two. I've got enough money for that. I've always wanted to do some work in the Sorbonne. By the end of two years I think the Southwest will be willing to welcome us back."

Nothing could have so simplified the situation as Kut-le's calm reference to his plans for carrying on his profession. He stood in his well-cut clothes, not an Indian, but a well-bred, clean-cut man of the world. Even Porter recognized this and with a sigh he resigned himself to the inevitable.

"You folks better come down to the monastery and be married," he said.

"Gee! What'll I say to Katherine!" groaned Jack.

"Katherine will understand," said Rhoda. "Katherine always loved Kut-le. Even now I can't believe that she has altogether turned against him!"

Jack Newman heaved a sigh.

"Well," he said, "Kut-le, will you and Rhoda come down to the monastery with us and be married?"

His young voice was solemn.

"Yes," answered Kut-le, "if Rhoda is agreed."

"I will come!" she said.

Her face still wore the look of exaltation.

Kut-le did not let his glance rest on her, but turned to Billy.

"Mr. Porter," he said courteously, "will you come to my wedding?"

Billy looked dazed. He stared from Kut-le to Rhoda, and Rhoda smiled at him. His last defense was down.

"I'll be there, thanks!" he said.

"There is a side trail that we can take my horses down," said Kut-le.

THEY all were silent as Kut-le led the way down the side trail and by a circuitous path to the monastery. He made his way up through a rude, grass-grown path to a cloistered front that was in fairly good repair. Here they dismounted and waited while Kut-le pulled a long bell-rope that hung beside a battered door. There was not long to wait before the door opened and a white-faced old padre stood staring in amazement at the waiting group.

Kut-le talked rapidly, now in Spanish and now in English and at last the padre turned to Rhoda with a smile.

"Are you?" he asked. "You are quite willing?"

"Yes," said Rhoda, though her voice trembled in spite of her.

"And you?" asked the padre, turning to Jack and Billy.

The two men nodded.

"Then enter!" said the padre.

And with Cesca and Molly bringing up the rear the wedding-party followed the padre down a long adobe hallway across a courtyard, where palms still shaded a trickling fountain, into a dim chapel, with grim adobe walls and pews hacked and worn by centuries of use.

The padre was excited and pleased.

"If," he said, "you all will sit, I will call my two choir-boys who are at work in the olive orchard. They are not far away. We are always ready to hold service for such as may wish to attend."

He disappeared through the door of the choir-loft and returned shortly, followed by two tall Mexican half-breeds, clad in priceless surplices that had been wrought in Spain two centuries before. They lighted some meager candles before the altar and began their chant in soft, well-trained voices. The padre turned and waited. Kut-le rose and, taking Rhoda's hand, he

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led her before the aged, white-haired priest.

To the two white men the scene was unforgettable. The dim old chapel, scene of who could tell what heart-burnings of desert history; the priest of the ancient religion; standing before him the two young people representative of a vanishing and a conquering race, both startlingly vivid in the perfection of their beauty, while looking on were the two wide-eyed squaws with aboriginal wonder in their eyes.

It was but a moment before Kut-le had slipped a ring on Rhoda's finger, but a moment before the priest had pronounced them man and wife.

As the two left the priest, Jack kissed Rhoda solemnly twice.

"Once for Katherine," he said, "and once for me. I don't understand much how it all has come about, but I know Kut-le and I'm willing to trust you to him."

Kut-le gave Jack a clear look.

"Jack, I'll never forget that speech. If I live long enough, I'll repay you for it."

"And an Indian keeps his promises," said Rhoda softly.

Billy Porter was not to be outdone.

"Now that it's all over with, I'll say that Kut-le is a good fighter and that you are the handsomest couple I ever saw."

Kut-le chuckled:

"Cesca, am I such a heap fool?"

Cesca sniffed.

"White squaws no good! They——"

But Molly elbowed Cesca aside.

"You no listen to her!" she said.

"Oh, Molly! Molly!" cried Rhoda. "You are a woman! I'm glad you were here!"

And the men's eyes blurred a little as the Indian woman hugged the white girl to her and crooned to her,

"You no cry! You no cry! When you come back, Molly come to your house, take care of you!"

After a moment Rhoda wiped her eyes, and Kut-le, who had been giving the old padre something that the old fellow eyed with joy, took the girl's hand gently.

"Come!" he said.

AT THE door the others watched them mount and ride away. The two sat their horses with the grace that comes of long, hard trails.

"Maybe I've done wrong," said Jack, "but I don't feel so, though I'm awful sorry for DeWitt."

"I'm awful sorry for DeWitt," agreed Porter, "but I'm sorrier for myself. I'm older than DeWitt a whole lot. He's young enough to get over anything."

When they had ridden out of sight of the monastery, Kut-le pulled in his horse. He sat looking into Rhoda's face. In his eyes was the same look of exaltation that made hers wonderful.

"You meant it all, Rhoda? It was not only to save my life?"

"Do you have to ask that?" said Rhoda.

"No!" answered Kut-le simply. "You see I waited for you. I knew that they would bring you back. And if you had not spoken, I would rather have died. I had made up my mind to that. Oh, my love! It has come to us greatly!"

Then, as if the flood, controlled all these months had burst its bonds, Kut-le crushed Rhoda in his arms and laid his lips to hers. For a long moment the two clung to each other as if they knew that life could hold no moment for them so sweet as this. Then side by side they rode off into the desert sunset.

THE END

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MY LORD'S PLOT

DICK RETURNS FROM THE VOYAGE WITH DORICOT

BY H·C·BAILEY

SHE came from a copse of silver birch and daffodils. A west wind was blowing through the sunshine and the great shoulders of the downs stood gray beneath cloud shadows. To northward the valley was dim behind the gauze of a swift shower.

The meadow grass was lustrous and the million flowers among it flamed bright as jewels. The trees bore their leaf-buds still, all rosy and gold and sea-spray green. A blackbird in a riotous willow mocked her as she came.

Mary Rymingtowne in this Springtime felt herself very much a woman. She was tall enough for any woman, to be sure. Even in her cloak she was slight. Its hood shadowed the grave virginal charm of her face, kept the shimmering brown hair all but secret. She was all silvery gray, save

IN THE September ADVENTURE there was a story called "Black Magic," with its scene laid in England just before the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The hero was of a kind new to fiction—Dick, a hulking lout of a Berkshire shepherd, generally regarded as a bit lacking in his wits. But the reader gradually sees that Dick is very far from lacking in his wits. Hidden under his stupid manner and appearance is a master mind in craft, generalship and knowledge of human nature. In "Black Magic" Dick cleverly saves Gabriel Rymingtowne, lord of Assynton Manor, from the murderous plot of a relative who covets his estates and his daughter. It becomes evident that Dick loves Mary Rymingtowne. Therefore, he goes forth to win his fortune. In "The Venture of Captain Doricot" (March) Dick meets with an adventurer who knows an opportunity for a rich voyage to the Orient, but has neither ship nor gold nor men. By force of wits and hands, they gain a sum of money and set out together for Bristol, each recognizing in the other a useful companion. "The Alderman's Voyage" (April) tells how Dick and Doricot secure the good ship *Toby* for their venture, and kidnap its owner, the fat and pursy Alderman. In "The Woman in the Veil" (May), after a great sea-fight with the Turks and an escape from the galleys in an open boat, Dick, the Alderman, the boatswain and Doricot land on the coast of Egypt, Doricot still intent on rescuing an old comrade from slavery in Alexandria. "Out of Prison" (June) describes the meeting between Doricot and his friend, Matt Winkfield; the treachery of the latter; the escape from prison; the slaying of Winkfield by Doricot; and the death of Doricot on the homeward voyage.

THE EDITOR.

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for a band of gold about the slim ankles. But from the hood her eyes shone and her lips were dark.

She came upon a man who was only her father. She checked suddenly and then recovered herself with imposing dignity. She looked at him as though she would ask how he dared exist. He laughed gently and made her a bow.

"I ask pardon, madam."

"I do not know what you mean."

"I see that I ought not to be here. But, by your leave, I could not tell that you would be here to resent it. For you said you would stay with your books."

"I came to the end."

Mr. Rymingtowne opened his eyes wide.

"Now, God ha' mercy! I thought you were only at the beginning."

It is to be supposed that inside the hood she was blushing, for she turned half away and she cried out with some petulance,

"I can not tell what you mean."

Again Mr. Rymingtowne laughed:

"Then indeed I'll not tell you. Prithee, may I walk with you? For I never saw a prettier child."

"You will always talk to me like a child."

"My dear, the day will come when you'll be glad enough of that. But, indeed, you are too much a child yet." He looked at her with a whimsical smile, but she would not look at him. "Well! I am old enough to know when I am in the way, Mary. And yet—I came to remind you that I am in the way."

With which he touched his hat to her and passed on.

She did not wait, she did not look after him, she went the other way hastily. By the brookside a while, and then, where it wandered curling across the meadows, she went, and up still by a hollow path where there was a gleam of primroses and the scent of violets. Then she stopped and, faltering, went back a little, and turned again and came very slowly to a level place scooped in the side of the down as though men had worked there in years long since gone.

She hesitated, walked a little this way and that, petulantly, then turned, and climbing the bank of the hollow path, stood looking out over the vale, fronting the wind that bore back her cloak against her slender figure.

A MAN came riding. As she turned, he saw her there in the wind and cried out,

"Artemis! Artemis that roams the mountains!" and bowed beautifully.

Mary Rymingtowne came down from the bank.

"I do not know who this Artemis is, my lord," she said.

"She was a maiden goddess most beautiful; and you are she," said my lord, and dismounted with too much grace.

He was fine in a cloak of pale-gold velvet with all the rest of him to match. He stood as tall as she and nearly as slight. He seemed to desire the fantastic even in the twirl of his little black beard. But there was plainly vigor enough in him, and fire. It appears from other sources that my Lord Branscombe was one of the most human of the Italianate Englishmen who frightened his age.

"I do not want to be a goddess. I want to be alive; I want to be real."

"Then have you your desire, i' faith! For you have more life in you than the Spring wind itself or its wild kissing rain. That is why all the world comes wooing you."

"Oh, I cry you mercy!" she laughed. "If I were so beset, I had best go hang myself for the sake of peace. But I thank you, my lord," she made him a little curtsey, "there is none who so troubles me."

But her voice was not quite calm.

"Am I so cursed?" my lord cried. "Can I not even trouble you? That heart which abides in the beatitude of you, has it not yielded to beat one throb the quicker for me? Why then, out upon my loutish body, my Bœotian wit, that can not show you what is in my soul! For I swear by Dan Orpheus, which was the greatest of all lovers, since the unhappiest he was, the soul of me is agonizing for love of the joy of your life!"

"Sure 'tis out of an Italian poetry book?" she suggested demurely.

"Ah, madame, I know you must mock me. It's the royal right, it's the most bewildering charm of you. That life that's more than man's life in you must ever make a mockery of the antics of men who pray and worship and love if by any means they may win something of your spirit. You must ever be cruel, in virtue of your wonder of womanhood. What am I who long and

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yearn but an awkward gamboling fool to your sure surge of strength?" His voice rang well.

"You call me strange names," she said and her bosom heaved. "Nay, my lord, it is not so indeed. I am not strong at all. I can not tell why you talk so of the life in me. I am all weak and—and little. I—I do not know—" Her lip trembled and she looked at him with wide eyes very wistful. "It is you, it is you who mock, I think," she said slowly. "You make me feel like a child when grown folks laugh at it. You talk as I can not understand—things I have not known, I have not felt. And I—I do not know. I am not sure. You are so much more than I am."

"Infinitely little, infinitely humble before you!" he cried. He moved the reins on his arm and flung back his cloak and struck a gallant figure. "Yet with your spirit calling me to achievement I will be something in the world's eye. I cry an answer to your challenge. I will make myself a power in England! ay, and beyond her seas! I swear it by the light in your eyes!" He caught her hand, but she turned away. "Look at me! Look at me! Why, you are not afraid?"

There was exultation not the least fantastic in his voice.

But she turned and met his eyes full and fair.

"I am not afraid," she said and her face was quite calm, but wistful still.

ON A SUDDEN his horse plunged violently and a little chalk flint came bounding at her skirts. She started aside and looked all about her. It seemed as if some one had thrown at them. There was no one in sight. My lord did not look for any one. He had not seen the stone. He was muttering imprecations on horseflies as the horse and he danced together. And she said nothing, from which you may infer what you will.

When he came to her again, he whispered, "Nay, Mary, it is I who am afraid, afraid before the beauty of your soul, for I can never give it worthy service. Yet more, my heart and my queen, yet more than any man. I am born to know you and serve. You call to me for all that I am and I——"

He was drawing her to him but she cried out, "Not now! not now!" so passionately that he let her go. She did not shrink from him, but still meeting his eyes, "I do not know," she said.

A long time he stood looking at her in silence, then fell on one knee and kissed her hand.

"It's a thousand years till to-morrow," he said.

"To-morrow," she said in a strange thoughtful tone.

He kissed her hand again and sprang on his horse and with an excellent bow dashed romantically away.

Mary Rymingtowne went down the hill very slowly. It is to be supposed that she saw little but thoughts and dreams as she went. For after a little way she found herself on a sudden face to face, breast to breast, with a man. She caught her breath. He might have risen out of the ground for all she knew of his coming. She drew back a little, haughtily and erect, and stared disdain at him. He did not move out of her way.

He was a hulking fellow, heavily built, long-limbed, loose-limbed. His threadbare faded doublet seemed too small for him. He had a great hole in one stocking. There was much rust on the dented scabbard of the short sword at his side. His big lean face, all brow and chin and jaw, was hungrily fierce. He looked altogether one of the discarded serving-men or one of the broken-down gentry, turned swashbucklers, thieves, assassins, of whom England knew many in those years. You recognize Diccon the shepherd who went seafaring and called himself Richard Rymingtowne.

"You'll ha' forgot who I am," he drawled, and she saw the deep-set gray eyes gleam. "I ha' come to make ye remember."

"Ah!" There was something more than the surprise of sudden memory in the cry. Then she laughed a little. "I know you, Diccon. But you are so burnt! And I am sure you are much bigger. Oh, but of course, I know you!" She held out her hand, smiling.

He clutched at it and gripped it.

"Maybe I am bigger," he drawled. "'Tis for you to find out what I be. You ha' forgot, mistress."

Her hand, her arm quivered in his grip and she gave a cry of pain. But she did not speak, she did not try to free herself, and as she looked at him, strangely intent, her lips parted and she blushed dark.

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"You said you would come back," she breathed as if she spoke to herself.

"I went to sea to make my fortune. I ha' not made it. But I come back."

"Oh, I am sorry."

"Sorry that I be back?"

"No, no. Sorry you—you have not been fortunate."

"I come back wi' nought," he said heavily. "There's a brave fellow for ye now. What'll you say to him, mistress? To be sure you should talk haughtily to such."

"I? Oh, do you think I care if you are not rich?" Her face was alive and eager with tenderness. She was suddenly at ease now that he confessed failure and seemed to ask comfort. "I—we should not like you any better if you had made all the fortune in the world. It's you yourself which matters to us. How could you think we have forgotten?" As she offered comfort, she grew more and more kind:

"Ah, but it's you yourself that we—we—welcome. And I am glad indeed you have come. I don't care about fortune or not. How could you think that?" Her eyes were shining.

He gave a short, hard laugh.

"Eh, but you'll have to care, mistress," he drawled, and again she was quivering at his grip. She did not cry out, but she grew pale now, she began to draw away. "Well, I ha' come back. And here I have to throw a stone at your fine gentleman."

"You! It was you!" She tried to wrench her hand out of his, but only to make herself jerk awkwardly. She blushed. Then, with a parade of contempt: "I am sorry that I did not see you, sir."

"Nay, you was too busy. But I was there or thereabout. I was watching you," he drawled with some humor in his voice but none in his eyes.

She drew herself up. Her blush was no more than a touch of anger in either cheek. "Be pleased to let me go, sir," she said. "You do yourself wrong to behave so basely."

"Not I, God bless you," said he. He did not let go her hand but looked down at it grimly. "Ay, he kissed it, didn't he? A pretty gentleman, surely. And I ha' never done that; but you'm not for him, my lass." Suddenly he flung her hand away and took her by the shoulders, shaking her a little: "So you'll let him have no more of you. 'Tis not good for you to have him handling you. You'm for something bigger than the fine my lord knows about." It is likely that she felt frail in his grasp. She put her hands on his arms and tried feebly to thrust him away. But anger had fled from her face and she was pale again. "You ha' forgot. You'm for me."

He let her go, pushing her a little back. After a moment she broke out into wild laughter:

"Oh, I ought to be angry. Ah, but, Diccon, I am sorry. You—you——"

"Ay, you'm angry, and you'm sorry and you'm laughing. For I be all mighty foolish surely. For I was born a poor shepherd and no more than a poor sailorman I be. Well, you would not ha' seen me now but that I heard to Devizes my lord was after you. I was but coming to have a sly look at ye and go again. Now I'll ha' done with him before I leave you. For poor sailorman and all that I be, you'm for me."

He waited a moment, frowning at her; then turned on his heel and was gone.

MARY RYMINGTOWNE, following very slowly, had some excuse for agitation and would not have confessed to it. For some time she had inclined to believe herself in love with my Lord Branscombe. He sought her so often that it had become natural to think of him as part of her life. He was so fine a fellow. He was so exciting.

It made him more exciting that her father should not like him. For the worst thing about him was his obvious desirability—wealth and birth and title. All that robbed him of charm, urged her to avoid him. But if he were forbidden, there was at once romance in him. If there was something considerable against him, he was fascinating.

She would have gone home with nothing but the most delicious thrills, if there had not been the intrusion of the preposterous Diccon. Not that she had ever forgotten him. He was too strange a creature. The dull loutish lad who had suddenly discovered himself alert and infinitely cunning and saved her father from a murderous trap; the boor who had plagued her childhood by following her and spying on her and who, in the moment when he was recognized a rare fellow, had left her in a hurry, swearing to come back.

The wonders of Diccon the shepherd had never been long out of her mind. The

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heavy, lumbering form; the heavy, lumbering speech; the dull, bulky face; the gleam of the deep-set eyes—all the outside of the man had somehow imposed itself upon her as significant, intimately important. Which was too absurd, for the creature was only a shepherd lad, ignorant, uncouth, a son of the earth, and she was Mary Rymingtowne of Assynton.

But even thought or dream of him had never dared to boast as he boasted that day. To throw stones at my Lord Branscombe's adoration! To profess himself penniless, a failure, a common seaman as the preface to a vaunt that she belonged to him! The greatest man in the world had no right to talk so and he—oh, he was impudence run mad. And yet, and yet, she owned, despising herself for having to own it, that he made her afraid. Certainly he was preposterous, he was mad: but the titillating thrills that should have come from my lord's ardor were quenched in a vague, harassing dread.

IT WILL not much surprise you to hear that before my Lord Branscombe arrived at that pleasant trysting-place on the morrow he met Dick. He was riding from his house at Whitchurch by the old track across the downs. His horse was suddenly aware of a white thing that fluttered and flapped and rustled. His horse resented it with proper spirit, shied violently, and but that my Lord Branscombe had nerve and resource in the saddle, would have taken them both a somersault down the steep, glassy slope.

On the verge of the track, my lord held him and turned to see the large clumsy shape of Dick rising at leisure, while a scarf was being tucked into his bosom.

"I see you was not thinking of seeing me," Dick drawled.

My lord, invoking the devil, asked who he was, and why (the devil again being called in aid) he was waving his shirt.

"My shirt?" Dick drawled gravely. "You ha' not seen my shirt. You be thankful. 'Twas an Egyptian scarf that frightened you." His brow came down. "As for who I be, 'tis no such matter, seeing you be my Lord Branscombe."

"What! You've an errand to me?"

My lord's tone changed to eagerness and he plied spur to urge his horse toward Dick, who was plainly distasteful to the animal.

Dick considered my lord solemnly. It was obvious that he expected a messenger. He supposed Dick to be the messenger and was excited. It would therefore be worth while for one who, in a general way, desired the overthrow of my lord, to find out what sort of message he wanted, what was the business that excited him. And Dick was always admirable—it is still characteristic of his family—in making the most of every chance that offered. Better at that than at seeing his way far ahead. So he considered my lord solemnly and solemnly nodded and said he,

"Ay, I've an errand to 'e."

"Whence do you come, my lad?"

Again Dick considered him and conceiving that it would be best to be mysterious, replied with one of the few fragments of French he knew:

"*Quoi! Monsieur ne comprend pas?*"

At once he saw that he had done very well. My lord was still more excited and cried out,

"You come from France?" Since he seemed to like the idea so much, Dick nodded sagely. "From Paris?"

Dick laughed. He began to guess his way. Queen Elizabeth had not been long upon the throne, was not very firm in her seat, and there were many enemies of her and her religion, of her father and particularly of her mother, plotting to pluck her down. Mary of Scots, who was Queen of France, called herself Queen of England, and it was common talk that many Englishmen were ready to fight to make her so.

"So you be one of them, my lord," quoth Dick to himself, and aloud he said, "Ay, monsieur, from Paris."

When he put himself in the way he had meant no more than to find out what manner of man my lord was. Perhaps, if it seemed useful, to pick a quarrel. But now if he were daintily handled my lord was going to confess himself a traitor, my lord was going to deliver himself to destruction.

"And what do they say in Paris?" Branscombe cried eagerly.

"They say as some of you says too much," quoth Dick, watching him from half-shut eyes. "Some o' you in England ha' been talking more than ye ought, whereby Queen Bess and her fellows do know more of ye than they need."

"God's body, is this your errand to me, sirrah?" my lord flushed. "D'ye tell me

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that I ha' been blabbing? Who bade you?" he paused for a reply and got none. "Who sent you, I say?"

Dick made a plunge:

"I do come from the Hôtel de Guise. From M. d'Elbœuf. You should ha' seen his veins swell when he talked of you."

My lord swore:

"Go back and see his veins swell when you tell him I say he is a fat fool!"

"Nay, nay, you'm too hot." Dick talked to him like a father. "'Tis not thought that you ha' done worse than young man's folly. But we do know things is known about your part. And there's a cunning old fellow hereby—Ribbletowne is it? Rymingtowne maybe—he's very stubborn for Queen Bess. And you do go consorting after a pretty lass which is his daughter. So M. d'Elbœuf would have you not do such. For no doubt she's a wily piece."

My lord with a shout consigned M. d'Elbœuf to hell. In a vehement flood of words said much else of him and his messenger.

"Now that's foolish," Dick remonstrated. "And it's no answer, neither."

My lord assured him through many oaths that no other answer there would be.

Dick shrugged a heavy shoulder.

"Amen, and so be it, then. A wilful lad mun have his way. But ye'll give it me in a letter, so please you. I'ld not charge my mouth with it."

"I'll give you a letter!" my lord cried with an oath. "Get you to Whitchurch!"

And off he galloped to his trysting-place.

Dick sat down to chuckle. It amused him to imagine Mary Rymingtowne's emotions if she were ever to hear of herself as a crafty traitress, a Delilah. My lord did not much amuse him. He was too likely to despise people whom he could deceive. But with himself, he was happily content.

MARY RYMINGTOWNE was late at the trysting-place, for several reasons. The day before, my lord had kept her waiting. Maidenhood as well as pride demanded that he should have to wait for her. He was to require an answer to the question whether she loved him, and she did not know at all what to say. It is possible that as she came, very late and still very slowly, she felt some faint hope that he might have gone away.

My lord, thanks to the interruption of Dick, had not been waiting long, but he displayed a great impatience. He sprang from his horse almost into her arms. He captured her with one arm, though she drew back and would have freed herself.

"My lady, my queen!" he cried. "I am mad with yearning for you! I have been upon the rack. Nay, look at me! Give me my answer from your eyes!"

Her face was red. She held herself away from him.

"I do not know," she said, and as she spoke, turned to look at him.

She meant her eyes to show no yielding. He might have seen doubt there and a brave honesty and the spirit of maidenhood. But my lord was one of the dangerous folk who see what they choose to see. To her horror, he caught her to him and cried out.

"Ah, the wonder of you! Mine for my crown and my delight! Mine!" Then almost as suddenly he let her go, kissed her hand fiercely and was in the saddle again and with a shout of "Mine!" dashed away.

Even in her bewildered alarm she saw that he was riding toward Assynton, toward her home, not his, and was the more troubled.

IN HIS upper room in the manor house at Assynton Mr. Rymingtowne sat studious over the astronomic tables of Reinhold. He was told that my Lord Branscombe had come and desired to speak with him. Mr. Rymingtowne caressed his little white beard for a while before he answered that my Lord Branscombe should be brought. The servant was just going out when he spoke again:

"Tell Mistress Mary that I can not come to her for a little." The servant begged pardon but Mistress Mary had gone walking and was still out. "Very well," said Mr. Rymingtowne and seemed more than satisfied.

My Lord Branscombe appeared with impressive grace.

"I rejoice," he explained, "that I have some claim to do myself this honor—to come upon Mr. Rymingtowne when he is alone with divine philosophy."

"It must be pleasant, I think, to rejoice so easily," Mr. Rymingtowne reflected. "But for my part, I am dazzled."

"Sir, I know no man, and I have known many the greatest in Christendom, for whose calm deep of wisdom I have such es-

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teem as yours. Believe me sir, it is true."

"It is probably because you have never heard me say twenty words together," Mr. Rymingtowne suggested.

"You are too modest, sir," my lord cried, and Mr. Rymingtowne hid a smile with his hand. "Your mere presence proves you a man who dwells with the mystery of the empyrean. I am proud that it is you to whom I come."

"You are much more mysterious than the empyrean, my lord," said Mr. Rymingtowne.

"I am glad that you do not guess my errand. I shall be plain enough ere all is told. Mr. Rymingtowne, I need not disguise from you that the wanton malice of folly has sought to make me think ill of you."

Mr. Rymingtowne opened his eyes wide:

"If folly says that I would have you think of me at all, 'tis the silliest folly ever I met."

"Sir, it is said that you intend ill to my ambitions, my schemes, my pledged faith. But——"

"But I never knew that you had any," Mr. Rymingtowne put in blandly.

"—but I curse such lies for the knavery of fools. And you will know how little I esteem them, what honor I have for you" (here Mr. Rymingtowne began to look at an astrolabe earnestly, to restrain his emotions) "when I tell you that I come seeking your daughter's hand!"

He struck a fine attitude. He was a well-made fellow, trained by the best masters in Italy, and magnificently caparisoned. But perhaps there was something too much condescension in his aspect.

For when Mr. Rymingtowne began to look at him, the whimsical amusement was soon gone from that lean, lined face. Mr. Rymingtowne rose and drew his long gown about him and spoke for the first time gravely,

"My lord, I hope that I value aright the honor which you intend to my family. But my daughter is not something that I can give. And——"

My lord laughed.

"Say no more, sir, say no more. I will stand surety for your daughter's good will. Come, let us——" he approached holding out his hand.

Mr. Rymingtowne went on quietly as if he had said nothing that mattered,

"And if it were mine to give, I tell you frankly, my lord, it is not to you that she would be given. I could not ask of you the condescension to take her."

"You do her wrong, by heaven!" my lord cried passionately, and then, as if light suddenly broke upon him, "Why, sir, why, do you mock me?"

"How could I?" said Mr. Rymingtowne sadly.

"What is your answer, then?"

"With my good will she is not for you, my lord. I doubt not I can rely on you to discover that you are not for her."

"Why, this is insolence!" my lord cried. "It is true, then, what he said! You are my enemy!"

"I protest, in this an excellent good friend to you. As to myself," said Mr. Rymingtowne placidly——

"Oh, you have your answer, have you? Be assured I shall have mine!"

Out my lord flung.

If you consider that he was on horseback, that he was in an ecstasy of vanity, and perhaps of passion, compelling him to a high speed, while Mary Rymingtowne was afoot with bewilderment and hesitation and fear, you will understand why he had come and gone before she was back at Assynton Manor. Moreover, as he went off by the straight road to Whitchurch instead of that bridle-track past the trysting-place and over the downs, she did not see him again that day.

NOW Dick, who had, you remember, appointed to meet Branscombe at Whitchurch and there obtain his letter to M. d'Elbœuf, determined that my lord would be none the worse for being kept waiting. Dick wanted to know what had happened at the trysting-place, whether Mary Rymingtowne had been told she was a Delilah—or something else.

So, as Mary came up the avenue of beeches, loitering here and there to pick a primrose or not to pick one, because she was afraid of what she might find at home, she heard a dragging step behind her and turned to see Dick grin.

"And how does my lord find himself today?" he asked politely.

Mary's cheeks burned. She took a step forward. For a moment he thought she was going to strike him. Her eyes flashed.

"You make yourself contemptible when you talk like that!" she cried.

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He grinned more broadly.

"And if I like to, 'tis what I like and there's an end."

"You do not like to. You are just a boy being rude and bragging," she panted.

His brow lifted. It was plain that her authority had surprised him. She saw it and was quick to take advantage.

"There, let us have no more of that, Diccon. Are you coming to the manor?"

"Well, now, I'ld not ha' said you was in such a hurry to get there," he drawled. "But if you can tell me for sure I'll not find my lord there, I'm willing."

She grew pale.

"You are impudent!" she stammered.

"Eh, you'm expecting him there likely," his sunken eyes grew keen.

She swept away from him and on, and he lumbered after. He did not feel at all sure, it appears, what my lord had said to her.

They found Mr. Rymingtowne walking on the terrace. He came toward them quickly.

"Why—" he recognized Dick with surprise— "why, Mary, I find you in good company! Diccon, lad, I am something more than glad to see you home again."

Dick took his hand, but drawled, "And I'm noways glad to see you. I went away for to make my fortune, and here I come back wi' nought."

"Is that worth being sorry for?" said Mr. Rymingtowne.

"Who said as I was sorry?" quoth Dick fiercely. "Time enough to be sorry when I'm beat. I do want a word with you." He paused. "If mistress here can spare you. And so be you're not busy with my lord." In diverse ways the faces of father and daughter expressed surprise. "My Lord Branscombe," Dick explained. "I heard tell as he was here."

With different emphasis the faces of father and daughter seemed to say that he was an uncanny creature.

"Prithee, Diccon, what do you know of my Lord Branscombe?" Mr. Rymingtowne smiled.

"Nought more than's common talk. 'Tis an Italianate fellow surely." He quoted the Italian proverb that an Englishman Italianate is a devil incarnate, and the two stared to hear him speak Italian. "'Tis known he hath a double life." A roving eye sought Mary. "I'd not mean he keeps a wife stowed away, but—but there, you do know him surely."

"We know that my Lord Branscombe is far above slander," Mary cried.

"He'll ha' told you so himself, to be sure," Dick drawled. "But, by your leave, may I have a word with you?"

He turned to Mr. Rymingtowne, who, with great respect, partly, perhaps, sincere, ushered him in.

Then Mr. Rymingtowne was again surprised, for Dick pulled out a leather bag, said that it held five hundred pounds, and desired Mr. Rymingtowne to buy for him therewith any land for sale within ten miles of Assynton. For he was soon off to sea again and could not stay.

"But you said you came back with naught, my lad?" Mr. Rymingtowne protested feebly.

"What be that?" Dick snapped his big fingers. "I do want a fortune."

"Here's the worth of a good farm."

Dick leaned toward him.

"D'ye think I'll be content wi' a farm?" he said fiercely. "I want—d'ye see—I want—— Oh, but you mean well, and ye'll do your best. Give ye good day."

He was gone before Mr. Rymingtowne had an answer.

MR. RYMINGTOWNE still felt breathless as he sought his daughter in her withdrawing-room. But after all his daughter was to him by far more important than the mystery of any man alive. Mary Rymingtowne betrayed anxiety. Her father sat down at his leisure.

"My Lord Branscombe has been with me, Mary." He waited for an answer and none came. She would not look at him. "He says that he wishes to make you my lady." Still there was no look nor answer. "He says that you—are not unwilling. That is not true?"

She looked up, blushing, but quite calm: "I do not know."

"My dear!" There was something of sadness, something of surprise in his voice. "I told him that it would never be with my good will."

"I—was afraid," she murmured.

"I do not believe he will ever win your will."

"I—I do not know," she murmured, and then, suddenly clasping her father's hand, "Oh, forgive me, forgive me!"

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He bowed over the hand and kissed it. They had been sitting some while silent when suddenly a vision of Dick rose before Mr. Rymingtowne's melancholy thoughts.

He made an exclamation.

"I protest our friend Diccon is a strange creature. Why did he talk of Branscombe?" Mary Rymingtowne did not feel able to tell. She sat with her head bent, her eyes hidden. "It is not often one finds a man so much of a man as to be puzzling. But he—he bewilders."

"He is bewildering," said Mary Rymingtowne; and then, to her father's complete amazement, she began to cry.

DICK had a five-mile walk before him to Whitchurch and took it leisurely and arrived with the twilight. He announced himself as "The man that's come for the letter," was at once admitted, and found my lord in a bad temper.

"You should have been here hours ago, fellow!"

"Eh, I'm slow and you be quick and that's the difference 'twixt you and me." My lord made an angry noise resenting any comparison, though it only discovered a difference. "But time enough for me to take your letter. Where is it?"

My lord could not give it him without making a large and florid speech about what was in it. The letter was a great effort in the euphuistic style, containing more tropes and far-sought adjectives than you would easily believe. Its substance was that if M. d'Elbœuf said my Lord Branscombe was betraying secrets he was a liar and a fool; that my lord could more easily do without M. d'Elbœuf than M. d'Elbœuf without him; that without M. d'Elbœuf moving one fat finger, my lord would engage to start such a surge of revolt in England as should carry his most noble and most glorious liege lady, Mary Stuart, Queen of France, of Scotland, of England and of hearts, safe to the English throne.

WHEN Dick came back to the room in the ale-house at Assynton where he lodged, he slipped a hot knife under the seal and read the letter, that there should be no mistake how it sounded. He was well satisfied. My lord convicted himself of treason so clearly that the silliest justice of the peace would have no doubt about arresting him. Dick was rarely in a hurry. He put the letter back in his pocket. But the old boatswain who was his companion at the ale-house found him more than commonly bibulous that night.

On the next day he was as soberly sluggish as ever. Dick was, of course, anxious to see what happened, if anything were to to happen, at the trysting-place. He lay on his face for some time in vain.

Mary Rymingtowne did not come at the familiar hour nor my lord either. But after a while Dick heard horses. My lord appeared, reined up and waited as much as half an hour. Then he shouted out something and other men came spurring up, one with a led horse that bore a woman's saddle. They passed on and out of sight. Dick went down the hill at a run.

It was always Mary Rymingtowne's habit to walk by the brook. There each in turn, each in his own way, Dick and my Lord Branscombe had learned to covet her. Down by the brook Branscombe led his horsemen and halted them behind a copse and went on still. He was rewarded.

Mary Rymingtowne stood alone, a slim gray creature with a bunch of kingcups golden in her hand. She was looking down at a swirling pool of gray water where the trout were leaping.

"Well met, well met!" my lord cried and bent to the saddle and snatched her hands, flowers and all.

She looked up at him with a strange glow in her eyes.

"I did not bid you come," she said.

"Not with your words, but with your soul!" he cried. "Come, my heart's mistress, come the irremeable way! I have endured my probation for an eternity in each day. I can no more! Grant me my paradise. Come, crown me! Come, sound the clarion to my spirit in the emprise that I must venture! Nay, I'll be denied no more! Maiden modesty hath had its hour. I am hungry and thirsty for you!" He snatched her in his arms and swung her up on the saddle before him. "You are mine! You are mine!" he cried, and had his horse round and was off.

"It is not—it is not—I will not!"

She was breathless and struggling, but not desperate.

"My will is thy will and thine mine!" He drove in his spurs.

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She panted out, "No, no, no!" but very soon she rested quiet against him.

There was a strange smile in her eyes.

His horsemen thundered after him, and so they sped on over the windy down to his house at Whitchurch.

To Mr. Rymingtowne's woodman, as he overlooked the fencing of a new plantation, there appeared, running, a fat and aged fellow who sobbed out,

"Go 'e up to squire! Tell 'e as my Lord Branscombe hath stole his daughter and is away to Whitchurch wi' her!" and therewith collapsed upon the ground and seemed like to burst. This was the boatswain.

I HAVE always supposed that Dick had some particular affection for Mr. Rymingtowne. Else I do not think that he would have troubled to send him news of the affair. For that was plainly mere courtesy. Dick proposed to deal with my lord himself. A father's assistance was therefore merely superfluous. Dick had run back to his ale-house and taken the one cob that was all its horseflesh and while the boatswain carried his message to the manor he was riding to Whitchurch.

My Lord Branscombe's house at Whitchurch, hardly as old as himself, was in the Italian style, formal without and magnificent within. Mary Rymingtowne, set down breathless and disheveled in its hall, saw her disorder reflected in a hundred panels that shone like mirrors.

Vases of gold and silver glittered everywhere, and gleaming white statues of a luscious style. It was yet more disconcerting that a whole regiment of servants was bowing, servants all silk and velvet, as fine as the finest gentlemen she had ever seen.

But my lord hurried her on. Whether or not she had been willing to be captured, she was very glad now of the arm that surrounded her and bore her away from those eyes and that alarming splendor. For my part, I believe she had enjoyed the capture.

I am sure that she never liked my lord so well as on this day of his violence. She was never, of course, afraid of him. She was vastly surprised to find that he could venture anything so boldly masterful. But since he could, she found him delicious.

But if his passion for her could make him manly enough to play the master, mad enough to take her by force, surely he was the perfect lover. A man not of stature, not of force to make the woman's soul quail, yet with a strength of passion that made him challenge the world for her sake, surely he must be all that woman could desire. At least, he could keep her safe from that strange, savage, frightening creature, Diccon the shepherd. But even in this glorious excitement of body and mind, the memory of Dick started up to haunt her.

My lord brought her to a room with walls of yellow wood that shone like gold. There was furniture of austere classic shape. He pressed her down into a chair and bowed and kissed her foot.

"Welcome and a thousand times welcome to your shrine!"

She looked over her shoulder and then turned with flaming face, calling herself silently a fool and a coward. Why should she expect to see Dick's heavy shape slouch in?

"'Tis a temple all unworthy of you, my divinity, even as this poor spirit of mine is by far too mean a house for the glory of thine. Yet of both shall you make what you will till they are fashioned anew to the need of thine own perfection. Come, my soul's desire, come, the priest waits to speak the words that proclaim thee mine!"

"Now?" she cried, and began to tremble and laughed then.

THERE was a stumble of hurried steps and confused voices. The door flung open as if the latch was burst. Dick came thudding in. He pulled up short and chuckled and stood breathing hard, looking down with grim scorn at the red-faced disheveled Mary and my lord's splendor kneeling at her feet. He drawled,

"You ha' done it finely, you have, to be sure!"

Branscombe sprang up and rushed at him, swearing in two languages, and was thrust off to reel back upon Mary.

"You'll have all England calling you fool, you will," Dick grinned.

"Burn your impudence!" cried Branscombe. "What folly brings you here again?"

"Yourn," quoth Dick. "And do you be mighty glad I be here before the Sheriff."

"The Sheriff?"

"The plot's blown upon. The game's up. They'm mustering yeomen to Newbury and Reading. The Sheriff's a-riding

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for you with his posse. 'Twill make a pretty tale against you, you caught fooling here with a lass!"

My lord swore a great oath.

"I will hold the house against him! I will make good upon him though he bring all the county!"

"Aw, you do talk like as if you was in liquor. To be sure, 'tis much the same to have a lass wi' you. Hold this house, which is but a pleasance, an egg-shell to crack 'twixt two fingers! Aw dear! And wi' these popinjays o' servants against the Sheriff's yeomen! Aw, dear, aw dear!"

"Do you think I will be taken like a sheep, sirrah?" my lord cried, trembling with rage.

"For sure you will, if here you do stay. What ballads they'll make upon you!—

"Sheep, sheep, silly sheep,
You're only fit for treason!
And so they sell your quarters cheap
When hangman's done 'e reason!"

My lord swore at him.

Dick lounged across the room and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Out on it, man, pluck up heart and do some'at! Never be made a mock to all the world! A silly show! Bah! Take horse and ride—ride away to them you know of—to him that's nearest, and see what comes, and gather your men!"

"By heaven, that's well said, fellow!" my lord cried. "I'll away to Sir Stephen this hour."

"Ay, to Sir Stephen, surely," Dick agreed, who had never heard of him before. "But this hour, quotha! Out on it, this minute! I tell 'e you'll ha' no breath to spare. They're a'most upon 'e now. Away with you! Ride! Ride!"

My lord stood in a dramatic attitude of thought, then muttering,

"I knew their fear would make them strike me first!" he rushed out.

Dick turned from watching the curtain fall behind him and looked down at Mary Rymingtowne, much as you may conceive a tiger regarding its froward whelp, large, cold and grim. To all the swift talk she had not put a word. Through it all she sat silent and never stirred, looking with wide eyes of alarm at Dick, at Dick only. She looked at Dick still.

My lord was hardly gone before he put his head in again.

"You will be safe," he panted. "You are in no danger. Heart of my heart! You are no part in it. You——"

"What's yon that I hear?" Dick growled, who indeed heard nothing.

My lord fled out.

THEY were left still looking at each other, Dick and his tigerish stare against the bewildered fear in her eyes like a child's when it dreads unreasoning strength. It was some time before Dick began to grin. Then he jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"Yon's a pretty thing to go riding with, my lass. You might ha' chose one which was braver nor a Jack rabbit. What's he running from now, if 'e please? Nought but a turnip and a sheet as I showed him like boys playing ghosties. Oh, a fine fellow for a lass to get o' horseback with!"

"What do you mean?" she cried.

Dick laughed.

"To be sure, there's no Sheriff nor no yeomen, and I could a'most believe there's no plot neither. Only he told me so. See here, my lass. When I found the Jack o' Green was running after you, I put myself in his way to ask him what he was to do such. Before I knew it, he was blabbing out that he was in a plot to pull down the Queen and put Mary o' Scots and the filthy French over us. So I let the fool think I was in it too, and he gave me a letter to one of his fine friends in Paris that's enough to hang him for the traitor he is. I kept it safe, you be sure, for them as will know how to use it. But when he played these chap-book antics with you, I thought it would be good for you if I showed you first what a skimble-skamble fool he is.

"Look at him now, scuttering like a rat for nought but a fellow that comes wi' a tale and mocks at him. For there's none after him, my lass, but your father that'll be here soon to take you home and box your ears."

Her face was flaming.

"Is it all true?" she gasped.

"Bide a bit, and you'll see."

"About the letter?" He plucked it out and gave it her. She took it in trembling fingers, saw the seal and read in my lord's hand the superscription to M. d'Elbœuf. She gave a little cry. "Is it—is it, indeed?"

"'Twould hang a better man nor your popinjay, my lass," Dick drawled.

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She bent down and hid her face in her hands and was shuddering with sobs. A clashing sound startled her. She looked up pale and saw, through her tears, Dick holding a tinder-box and blowing the sparks to flame. He took the letter and lit it and grinned at her as it floated in glowing flakes to the ground.

Her lips parted, she tried to say something and was very sweetly piteous. Dick did not come to her or speak, but his face grew somber and stern.

"And now—now?" she murmured and her voice was a cry for pardon and something kindlier. "Ah, what's that?" the din of hurrying horsemen broke upon them.

"'Twill be father coming to box your ears," quoth Dick cheerily. "To be sure, 'tis time. And now—now I'll be going away again. Away to try fortune again."

"Away again," she repeated like an echo, pale to her lips.

"Ay, and here's to mind you while I be gone." He plucked from his belt an Eastern dagger and thrust it upon her against her bosom. "You—you wait and keep it clean."

The blood flooded her face again and she shook.

Dick stood over her; only turned away when Mr. Rymingtowne rushed in,

"Eh, you ha' no call to puff," he drawled. "She'll do well enough. I ha' scared my lord off. Told him you'll have his blood. But don't 'e trouble. You'd find none in him."

He thrust past the amazed man and out and away.

The GOOD SAMARITANS

AN EPISODE OF THE ATLANTIC DRAW-POKER INDUSTRY

By E·A·MORPHY*

MR. TRENCH'S faith in human nature was so deeply shaken, so obviously jarred, that Mr. Carrington would scarcely have been astonished to see him bursting into tears.

"I never knew anything done so smooth in all my born days!" said the latter soothingly. "But for a solid-looking old buster like him to be calmly cheating with the cards is enough to—enough to—well——"

The exigencies of the situation were beyond the pale of Mr. Carrington's vocabulary.

Mr. Trench shook his head in a gesture of helpless woe and sighed bitterly.

"Honest to goodness!" said he, "I'd

*See page 631.

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as soon thought of catching the skipper trying to scuttle the ship as finding old Parker trying to stack the cards on anybody. And then to think of him trying his little games on you and me!"

Again he shook his head.

Mr. Carrington did the same. To him it seemed in the nature of a blasphemy that a sentient fellow creature should attempt a trick so futile on Mr. Trench. Indeed the bare idea that anybody capable of such adroit deception should fail to recognize in his chief the absolute king-pin and master hand of everything in that line on three continents assailed the honest heart of Mr. Carrington as a bereavement and a shock.

But there stood the fact, raw and incontrovertible. What were they going to do about it?

Mr. Trench was equally upset and disappointed. During all his experience as an unassuming but invincible exponent of the various games of chance that are popular on the mighty greyhounds of the Atlantic he had never come across such a juicy and compact field for the exercise of his professional endeavors as that afforded by the pleasant little coterie of passengers that daily patronized the smoking-saloon of the leviathan liner *Hercules*.

Now, one of the choicest peaches, as Mr. Carrington called them, in that collection had turned out to be something in the nature of an apple of the Dead Sea. The podgy and rosy faced and preëminently respectable and responsible-looking Mr. Parker had turned out to be a whited sepulcher—a cheat of no inconsiderable dexterity, though purely "a mug" when regarded from the higher plane of Mr. Trench's or Mr. Carrington's exalted art.

Neither Mr. Trench nor his lieutenant was in a position to breathe a word of their discovery.

Moreover, despite the harrowing disappointment of it all, there was a pleasurable spice of piquancy afforded by the situation of two such sublime experts as themselves being selected for exploitation by such a comparatively butter-fingered amateur as this deceptive Britisher, Mr. Parker.

"He must have thought it was blind luck we were gambling on," commented Mr. Carrington, "and he has marked us down among the soft and easy ones, to be looted when we are good and ripe."

"I don't know," replied Mr. Trench. "Between us we've cleared him out of over three hundred pounds in English money. It may be that he is only some god-forsaken understrapper that has dropped his employer's cash through wanting to keep his end up among bigger men than himself. If so, I guess he'll find he's in the wrong shooting-box this trip. We'll burst him higher than a kite!"

MR. CARRINGTON'S jaw locked, and for the space of a couple of minutes the two daunted adventurers paced slowly up and down the promenade-deck in listless silence. Then Mr. Carrington spoke.

"By the way, Bill," said he, "I'm thinking what will happen to the girl if a smash comes."

He halted in his march and turned to the rail of the ship.

"It's old Parker's daughter I mean," he continued, pretending to be interested in the wash of the waves alongside. "She's the one with the blue eyes that's been crying the nose off her face in a quiet way this last day or so. I'd a sort of a notion at first that it was a case of fond father dragging away his beauteous child from a poor but honest lover out Tooting way. Now I've an idea that the girl knows he's been losing the oof and has got to go to quod, or get the sack, or jump overboard. Girls will get fussy over little troubles of that kind; and there can be no two words about it but that this girl is the prettiest angel on the ship."

"A nice sort of archangel she's got for a father!" grimly commented Mr. Trench. "Anyhow, it ain't the Parker offspring or Parker's family that I've been playing poker with, but plain Mr. Parker himself. I take it, Aleck, you know by this time that Bill Trench don't get fooling around no petticoats on any ship where he's doing business in the smoking-saloon?"

Mr. Carrington nodded dubiously. He well knew that his gifted chief was particularly wary where the ladies were concerned—shy as a bird of the fowler. But he knew also that Mr. Trench's caution in this respect was based upon his knowledge of his own weakness; for, outside of those painful duties of his vocation which rendered it necessary to despoil his victims as swiftly and as thoroughly as possible, the handsome Westerner had the heart of an ox, and was

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peculiarly sensitive to the wiles of women, who, as a class, admired his personal appearance.

"I don't wish to push you off your principles, Bill," said Mr. Carrington, "and, anyhow, I've never opened my mouth to this daughter of Parker's; but I think I'd feel bad in my bones if I thought she was going to get badly hurt. I've watched her now and then, on the side, when she's been heading off the Johnnies that's been trying to make up to her, and her eyes look as if she knew what it was to be hurt. It may be that the old man is an out-and-out bad hat, and has been letting her into hot places since she was a kid. Anyhow, I'm telling you, Bill, she's got the eyes of a girl that knows what it is to get hurt, and it kinder puts me off my oats to feel that you and I may be sticking a knife into her."

Mr. Trench stared at his lieutenant in pained surprise.

"If it was anybody else but you, Aleck," said he, "I'd think you was mashed on the fairy, and had an ax to grind. Seeing it's you, however, I know the game is a square one, and I think I'd like to take a squint at this blue-eyed Parker girl that has thrown your common sense so out of plumb by her snuffles. I might be able to do a bit of soft talking with her myself, and find out what real breed of bird she thinks her father is."

LOUT of the mud comes the bloom of the lily. Two human beings more unlike than Parker and his daughter, on shipboard or elsewhere, it would be difficult to see. Where Parker was coarse, the girl was simply ethereal; where his face was beefy, hers was like the rose; where his eyes were close-set and shifty, hers were like living sapphires—long-lashed wells of melting Irish blue. From beneath her dark green Tam o'Shanter tumbled a turbulent torrent of wavy golden hair, and her expression would have been sweeter than that of any painted Madonna but for the expression of haunting fear and inexpressible sorrow that lurked in its lineless beauty.

As they strolled past the deck-chair in which the girl lay, Mr. Carrington had not to point her out to his professedly misogynistical comrade. Mr. Trench realized at a glance that there was only one girl on the ship that could have enlisted the sympathies of his lieutenant; and as soon as he saw her himself his own brave resolutions faltered.

"By gosh, Aleck!" said he. "You're right about the eyes she's got! What a snorting shame it is that a girl like her should be sporting a father like Parker! It's things like that as makes a fellow feel like balking at the ways of Providence!"

"Sure pop!" agreed Mr. Carrington. "But what are you going to do about it? She's not the sort of girl you'd like to see let down and shamed before a whole shipload of gossip-mongering she-cats; and that's what will happen if her old man gets held up over monkeying with the pasteboards."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Trench. "I guess it's up to me to stay on deck during the first dinner this evening and see if I can't make up to her when she comes up from the saloon afterward. She looks like having the style and the breeding that can turn down a man flatter than a door-mat; but I'll have to take my chances about that part of it. Good Lord, Aleck! ain't us chaps accustomed to taking our chances?"

So Mr. Trench remained on deck and took his chances.

It was the third week in September, and the homeward-bound tide of American traffic was at its height. Owing to the crush of passengers, dinners had to be served in two relays. Parker and his daughter were in the first lot, Messrs. Trench and Carrington were in the second.

During the daytime every available inch of space on the promenade deck was crowded to its utmost; but in the nippier airs that followed the setting of the sun the place resolved itself into a chair-strewn desolation, with here and there an ailing passenger, or a small group of hardier ones, making the deserted expanse look all the more lonely.

The people began to straggle up from the early dinner. Parker was among the first of them. He came up alone and was chewing the end of an unlighted cigar as he ascended the spacious gangway.

A FEW minutes later, also alone, came Miss Parker, and Trench noted that she was in palpable distress. Her lips were pressed together, her eyes filled with tears. She could scarcely keep herself from falling. She staggered rather than walked to her deck-chair in the lee of one of the canvas wind-screens. There, in the darkness, she buried her face in her hands and wept.

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Mr. Trench looked over the rail and pretended to be busily absorbed in the waves that were racing by and chafing the black sides of the liner.

Presently, as the girl grew more composed, he turned from his contemplation of the Atlantic and walked across to where she lay huddled up in her deck-chair.

"Beg pardon, Miss Parker," said he, "but I know your father a bit, and thought I might speak to you without being introduced. I'm not much of a ladies' man. All I wanted to tell you was that if you're in a tight place—if you or your father is in a tight place—I'd like to help you."

Miss Parker sat up straight in her deck-chair and choked back her sobs. Then she wiped the tears from her eyes and cheeks with a hopelessly inadequate wisp of a handkerchief. Then she looked Mr. Trench squarely in the face.

"You beastly, vulgar, rich, American cad!" she gasped. "You dare to come and talk to me like that, when every day and every night you're beggaring and ruining my father! Oh you, you, you—!" she stuttered, unable to find words to express the profundity of her contempt and hatred. "Oh! go away from me, you horrid, horrid man! I only hope your wicked winnings will choke you!"

Resourceful man though he was, Mr. Trench felt for the instant quite dumfounded. Mentally, he was able to assure himself, with inexorable emphasis, "I'm up against it this time, sure!" But three good seconds passed before his tongue could lay hold of any suitable disclaimer of Miss Parker's charges. When he did speak, it was very quietly.

"'Beastly,' 'vulgar,' 'American,' and 'a cad'—these are all things, Miss Parker, which from your point of view I may very well be. 'Rich,' I am not. You see, my dear young lady, I'm a professional gambler—yes, go shout it to the skipper if you like! I'm a very disreputable person! At the same time I know what it is to be in a tight place and how to get out of one. When I figured on it that you were Mr. Parker's daughter, and noted your own and your father's nervous ways—you see he is playing just a bit wild-like now and then—I thought I might chip in, as a fellow who knew how it felt to be let down, and ask if there was any help wanted. And I don't mind admitting the fact, if you want to know the truth, that if there's anything really wants doing I'd sooner do it for you than for your father. For the rest, I fancied that you'd be more likely to tell me about your trouble if I gave you my own case, pat! See?"

Miss Parker buried her face in her hands and wept again.

"Oh, please forgive me! please stop!" she sobbed.

But Mr. Trench refused to be interrupted.

"If it's any extra comfort, Miss," he remorselessly persisted, "I'll go one further, and tell you that my friend with the petticoat concessions in Chihuahua is my old partner, Aleck Carrington, than whom there lives no better manipulator of a cold deck between San Diego and Siskiyou."

"Oh, thank God! thank God!" sobbed Miss Parker, irrelevantly and with seeming irreverence, "you're the kindest man I ever met, Mr. Trench! The kindest and noblest Christian I ever knew!"

"Easy, Miss!" interrupted Mr. Trench, "chuck them Christian virtues among the discards! Tell us what's the trouble with your daddy, and we'll see if we can't fix things straight!"

"Oh, Mr. Trench," sobbed the girl. "Can't you see what it is? Daddy's a gambler, too! That is to say, he tries to gamble, but he doesn't understand it, like you do; and he can't afford it. And now you've ruined him! The people in the smoking-saloon have ruined him, I mean. I'm sure you knew knothing about it when he played with you!"

"Tin-horn punter!" murmured Mr. Trench to himself, "Tin-horn punter with the nerve of a rabbit!"

BUT, as he thus inwardly ruminated, he laid his slim but capable hand on the shoulder of the weeping girl.

"Your dad's no gambler, Miss," said he, "only a bit of a flutterer. Why, he hasn't dropped three thousand dollars!"

"*Only* three thousand dollars!" sobbed the girl. "Why, that's six hundred pounds! Worse than that, too; it's five hundred pounds more than he could afford to lose! You see, it is his firm's money that's gone, not his own, and he has not got one hundred pounds left to pay it back with. I'm afraid he may do something desperate at last. Then, God help me!"

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Mr. Trench felt a lump gathering in his throat, but he strove to talk as a man, calm and only indifferently concerned.

"A hundred pounds is as good as five hundred dollars, Miss Parker," said he reassuringly. "Many's the thousand I've made on less. Just you don't say a word to your daddy or any one else about me being talking to you, and we'll see if we can't put him on his feet again before we strike little old New York."

It was dark in the shadow of the windscreen; therefore only the gentleman immediately concerned took notice when Miss Parker seized Mr. Trench's hand in both of hers and kissed it.

"God bless you, sir! Oh, God will bless you!" she faltered hysterically, "God will bless you for this!"

She covered his hand with kisses.

Mr. Trench nearly leaped off the deck.

The circumstances and sentiments involved were too romantic for his peace of mind, and the fact that the girl was as bewilderingly beautiful as she was obviously earnest in her thanks and her prayers only added to his feelings of embarrassment.

"That's O. K., Miss," he blurted confusedly, as he withdrew his hand. "You just buck up, and we'll look after your daddy! Don't you say you ever saw me. Forget all about it! See?"

He gulped out a sort of self-depreciatory cough, shook the weeping girl by the hand with the utmost decorum, and then sauntered back to the smoking-saloon where he ordered the longest possible drink.

Thereafter he held earnest converse with Mr. Carrington for the space of half an hour.

II

DURING the balance of that evening and all the next day the hands that were held and the stakes that were raked in by Mr. Parker were alike the envy and the amazement of every disciple of draw-poker on the good ship *Hercules*.

Passengers with conscientious objections to being seen at a card-table flocked to the smoking-saloon to watch the Englishman's remarkable play. For the greater part, these good people went away regretting that it was sinful to make money so easily.

Old exponents of the game shook their heads at the extraordinary combination of prescience and adroitness with which Mr. Parker drew and played his cards. It was like watching a human miracle.

And there was obviously no deception about his style or method—nothing but bull-necked luck, as the experts put it. For it was by antagonists who were obviously good players, but who were withal losing steadily—to wit, Messrs. Trench and Carrington—that the Englishman was dealt nearly all of his more remarkable hands. And some of those hands were pure miracles, if ever miracles were dealt out across the card-table of an ocean liner.

In fine, and to put the case as briefly as possible, Mr. Parker's play during Tuesday night and all day Wednesday was a generous education in the great American national game of draw-poker.

Wednesday night was Concert Night, and as two of the greatest operatic "stars" of Europe were traveling to New York by the *Hercules*, and every cabin passenger had to buy tickets for the customary charity performance, practically everybody went to hear what the famous singers were like.

Consequently by ten-thirty o'clock the smoking-saloon was more nearly deserted than it had been at any hour since the liner left Liverpool.

Among the few who had not been allured to the entertainment in the main saloon were Messrs. Parker, Trench and Carrington.

The appearance of Mr. Parker had undergone an absolute metamorphosis within the past twenty-four hours. On the wings of smiling fortune he had become self-assertive as a bumptious boy.

With devil-may-care recklessness, he chivvied the two gentlemen from the Pacific States on their inadequate knowledge of their own national pastime, and challenged them to a three-cornered game for half an hour or so.

"No, thanks," said Mr. Trench dryly.

"Funking it, eh?" suggested Mr. Parker. "It's no good doing that, you know. Luck's bound to turn!"

"My dear sir," said Mr. Trench, "there's no such thing as luck in poker when it's only you and me and Mr. Carrington here that's concerned. It's skill, pure and unadulterated skill, that does the trick every turn. From eight o'clock last evening until dinner-time to-night, all the real skill in this smoking-room was on your side. We

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put it there, me and Aleck Carrington. Now that skill is on my side exclusively. Take my advice and don't touch any game stronger than Beggar-my-Neighbor until you are well quit of this ship."

Mr. Parker bridled up.

"What on earth do you mean, sir?" he demanded. "Do you mean to imply that I cheated?"

"Nope!" replied Mr. Trench wearily. "You can't cheat us. I thought you'd have noticed that yesterday when you tried to. I mean that poker is a game that you should not touch with a forty-foot pole till you learn all about it, and that won't be on this side of New York!"

Parker sprang to his feet, his face aflame with guilt and anger.

"Nay, nay, friend!" warned Mr. Trench. "No tricks of fists in this respectable smoking-saloon. We're all alone here and I'm speaking for your own good entirely—giving you a warning that may save your life. For I assure you, that if you went springing any game like you tried on us yesterday at any open house in the Tenderloin, you'd get your eye shot through the back of your neck as sure as eggs are eggs!

"Ain't that so, Aleck?" he asked his partner in conclusion.

"That's so," said Mr. Carrington, and then he added a few more words of admonition to Mr. Parker on his own account.

The Londoner stood up from his seat like a man in a dream, and raised his hands furtively as he made a futile effort to speak.

"Better let me finish," said Mr. Trench, "for I've got some more good advice to give you: You're now just five thousand gold dollars ahead of this table, instead of being dead bust and three thousand dollars behind, as we had you yesterday. That has happened solely because you've a daughter that's a blanked sight too good for you. She's the nicest little girl on this packet, anyhow, and, though it's rough on her to have a father like you, she's lonely without her Dad.

"You just see that she don't feel lonely any more this trip. Don't give her any cause to, anyhow. And, finally, if me and Aleck here catches you blowing in any of *our* winnings in this here smoking-saloon between now and the minute we reach New York, we'll make you swallow a full pack of cards raw, and without chewing 'em either! Hi, steward, bring the whisky, please! There's one gent here wants brandy, but make mine and Mr. Carrington's plain rye."

As Parker slunk out of the smoking-saloon, Mr. Carrington turned to his chief.

"Well, Bill," he sighed, "if ever there were two blithering dubs of Good Samaritans on one and the same high-toned Atlantic liner, them two deserving travelers is Aleck Carrington and Bill Trench!"

"That's what, Aleck!" agreed Mr. Trench, "but it was you that set us on to the girl that put the kybosh on what promised to be one of the richest trips we ever took across the Western Ocean. That five thousand dollars we've just put in Parker's purse would have gone to your orphans and mine if it wasn't for him having that daughter. Kitty's her name, they tell me —Kitty Parker!

"Say, Aleck," he added pensively. "If ever I strike luck and settle down for keeps, I hope it will be with just such a nice little girl as that same Miss Kitty Parker!"

"She surely *is* a daisy!" said Mr. Carrington.

III

NEXT afternoon, while Mr. Trench was strolling unobtrusively past the barrier on the Hoboken Pier, a quietly but smartly dressed girl, whose face was hidden behind a fashionable veil, darted out from the crowd of passengers and officials and eagerly caught him by the coat-sleeve.

For the first time in many years Mr. Trench felt himself perpetrating a blush.

"I don't care who sees or hears me!" panted the girl, as she hastily lifted her veil, and let Trench gaze down into the Irish eyes that now shone brightly from the face of his unhappily fathered Madonna. "I don't care who sees!" she repeated, "I think you're the nicest man in all the world, the kindest and the best!"

Without another word she flung her arms around Mr. Trench's neck and kissed him full on the mouth.

Then she ran back to where Mr. Parker was dolefully superintending the examination of her baggage by a customs inspector.

Ten minutes later, on the ferry to New York, a tall, well-set-up man of about forty came up and accosted Mr. Trench. He was smartly dressed, and had the clear gray eye, the thin mouth and bluish,

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clean-shaven jaws of the true New York "Sport."

"Getting larky in your old age, Bill?" said he, after the customary greetings of two old friends. "Never seen you chasing trouble on that lay before. And, honest! I didn't think it was quite your class to go cutting out an ornery two-spot Cockney piker like Tubby Parker!"

"What are you giving us, Jim?" asked Mr. Trench, in accents of pure and unfeigned astonishment.

He took no offense at the apparent harshness of the criticism, because the critic, Jim Harvey, was one of the truest friends and straightest partners that Bill Trench could turn to in the great American metropolis.

"Nothing at all!" replied Mr. Harvey. "Only when a friend of mine has been howling for years that the mere sight of a pretty face or a petticoat gives him the blue immortal shivers, and then goes kissing a high-stepper like Kitty Flannigan right in front of all the world on Hoboken Pier, and under the nose of her own particular gentleman friend, Tubby Parker, well, then I begin to surmise that that particular and unfortunate friend of mine is beginning to get moth-eaten under his hat!"

Mr. Trench gaped at Mr. Harvey in mute amazement.

"I suppose," proceeded that gentleman thoughtfully, "that Kitty just kept you and Aleck Carrington hopping and lapping around her like a brace of poodle-pups all the way across, so as to leave her Tubby with a free hand and no insalubrious competition among the flats in the smoking-saloon. Was that the ticket, Bill?"

"Not quite," moaned Mr. Trench in a voice that was husky with emotion. "It was easier than that even! She just took and wept over my lily-white hand one evening by the moonlight, and then me and Aleck went into that smoking-saloon like a Kansas cyclone, scooped the dollars out of the pockets of every lamb in the place and poured 'em calmly into the hat of Mr. Tubby Parker!"

"Great Pink Elephants!" chortled Mr. Harvey. "I always said that Kitty girl was a sure winner! There's none like her on the turf. Irish-bred—trained in London and Paree, not a twelve-month on this side of the Fish Pond! Why, Bill, she's a born actress and a top-notch diplomat from the first shout. She's the greatest ever!"

"Go on!" said Mr. Trench. "I'm dead nuts on parables, and I only hope you know what you're driving at!"

"I'm driving at Kitty Flannigan all right, old sport!" explained Harvey, as one who spreads glad tidings with a joyful tongue. "Her original fancy was Russian Grand Dukes and Indian Princes. She'd just start weeping at 'em, and they'd melt into pecks of diamonds or ropes of pearls, or lakhs and crores of roubles and rupees. Each and every tear was a gold mine, and she could weep to beat the band. It was all most touching and interesting—especially touching—and if you didn't take such particularly small stock in the doings of the female of your species you'd have heard all about it even in China.

"But the most touching and interesting part of the whole romance was at the Grand Prix at Longchamps a year ago last June, where she met that ordinary and red-faced and beef-covered Tubby Parker, and promptly flung her arms around his neck. Next day she waves a glad 'Ta-ta' and fond 'By-by' to all her Great Moguls and Grand Dukes, and hikes it off with Master Tubby to play the smoking-saloons on the big ferries. Wanted sea air, she did, for a change.

"I understand you've been touring out China and India way," concluded Mr. Harvey, more sympathetically, "and I suppose that's how you come to lose all touch with the fashionable intelligence of this wild and woolly West."

"That's true, Jim," sighed Mr. Trench, "we've been out of the way of gossipers. But how on earth did a fairy like that come to be playing with a red-faced old punter like that Cockney? Why, she had only to give one little simpering sob behind the wind-screen, in the twilight, to turn me and Aleck into a pair of tiptop thieving Samaritans—robbing every living sinner on the *Hercules* just to help this blighter we thought was her misguided old father!

"Ah, well!" he ended hopelessly, "some fellows do get all the blessed luck!"

Mr. Harvey led his friend to the open deck and patted him cheerily on the shoulder:

"Don't you fret, Bill, old hunks!" said he, "luck calls on more folk than you give him credit for, and from what I have seen on the Pier just now, I fancy your turn's coming next!"

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The DYNAMITE CARGO

BY WILLIAM PATTERSON WHITE

I'D HELPED out Ibrahim a bit in the revolution, and he was very grateful, and bade me stay at his house as long as I liked. Ye see, Ibrahim had made himself Basha, for the old Basha was killed during the row, and there was naught too good for him in Dar-el-Dana. He was a strong man, was Ibrahim-el-Kaid, and you were either his friend or not. And if not, then you saw trouble, and no mistake.

The Sultan of Morocco was fighting the French over on the West Coast, and Ibrahim knew he'd be safe for a time. But just as soon as the war was over and a new Sultan took charge, then a *mahalla* would march on Dar-el-Dana and try to revenge the death of the old Basha. Oh, ay, they're over slow in Morocco, but they get around to doing things in the end.

Ibrahim-el-Kaid was no man to be caught napping. He'd be ready for the *mahalla* when it did come. So he asked me to sail to Tangier in the whaleboat of old Ramon Gonzalez and bring back a cargo of Gardner cartridges and all the dynamite the whaleboat could carry. I was always willing to help out Ibrahim, who was a real gentleman for all he was a Moor.

Diego Valdez and Old Ramon went with me. Spaniards they were, but they'd small love for their own country. I was skipper. I arranged that before we hoisted sail. 'Twas Old Ramon's boat, but I will not be passenger in a boat commanded by a Spaniard. And I knew Old Ramon for a poor seaman. We made a good voyage. The two Spaniards were friendly enough, but friendly or no, I didn't tell them of the money I had with me. Diego Valdez was honest, as Spaniards go, but Old Ramon was a fair pirate. I'd not trust him with sixpence.

Ibrahim had given me quite a bit. As I say, besides the dynamite, he wanted cartridges for the Gardner, if any were to be got. He knew a Scorpion named Hernando Levira in Tangier who'd been kicked out of Gib. and who dealt in contraband, rifles mostly, but 'twas a chance he might have some cartridges. So I kept my mouth shut and borrowed tobacco of Old Ramon like I hadn't a penny in my pocket.

On the voyage Diego got very confidential and said he'd a mind to bring back a wife from Tangier. He'd lost his first wife during the revolution.

"My Manuela is dead," said Diego, "and there is no one to cook for me. Behold, I know a girl in Tangier, a very nice girl, too. I would have married her before this, but Ramon would not sail to Tangier just for that—there was no money to be got for it. But now the whaleboat is going, I am going, and the girl is there. I will

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make her my wife and bring her back. You do not object, señor—no?"

"Not me," I said. "Marry all you like, and welcome. Just bid her mind the dynamite, that's all."

"I will do that, señor," said Diego Valdez.

We'd left Dar-el-Dana in the afternoon, and 'twas after dawn next day when we rounded to alongside the dock near the fishing boats and clewed up the sails. Old Ramon lay down on the bottom-boards and went to sleep one-time. I'd my work to do, and Diego had his wife to get, and we went ashore. The Spaniard slanted away, and I started off in the opposite direction.

I FOUND the Scorpion after a deal of trouble. He was suspicious at first, and I had a hard job to make him admit he'd ever seen a Remingtton or a box of cartridges. At last he said he had no cartridges for a Gardner in stock, but he could get ten thousand rounds from a friend for a huge sum.

"You've got those cartridges yourself, you old pirate," I said. "And you're telling me this friend of yours has another use for 'em and won't part with 'em under a high price because you've an idea you have me. You've not, though, my lad. I'm half-Scotch myself, and I know you're lying."

"*Por Dios!*" said the Scorpion, and he spread out his hands. "I am telling the truth! This my friend has the cartridges. I can get them not for less."

"Levira, d'ye take me for a fool? There's small demand for Gardner cartridges, and I know it. I'll pay you what's right and proper."

And I named a price.

The Scorpion jumped to his feet and called on a dozen saints to prove that he was telling the truth.

"Ye can tell all that to the marines! Mind ye, now, I'll give what I said, ye son of Ananias, and not one *peseta* more."

"I will see my friend," said the Scorpion, "and he may take a little—oh, a very little, less. I will find out."

Out he ran, and I stretched my legs in a chair and lit my pipe. The josser was just going down the street and then back again, for a bluff. He'd the cartridges himself. Oh, I know those Scorpions. They've an eye for money, and no mistake. In ten minutes the Scorpion was back.

"My friend will take half the former price," he said, and he mopped his sweaty chin with his sleeve.

"Run around the block once more, Andy," I said. "Split the half-price, and I'll take the cartridges. Slant away."

He looked at me, and he almost cried.

"What is the use?" he said, wiping his eyes. "You are worse than a Moor, you Englishman."

"Never mind the Englishman. That's a name I'll allow no one to call me, so just keep a civil tongue. Do I get the cartridges or no?"

"Yes," he said, "and I will cut the half-price in two."

"Ye'd best do just that, or ye can keep 'em."

'Twas an advance over my price, but naught to hurt.

I'd expected to pay twice as much. Ye must always be firm with a Scorpion and miscall him a bit. He'll do more for ye. Oh, ay, this one dropped the friend story now. He took me into a back room and showed me the boxes of cartridges. He'd other cartridges too, and I misdoubted he might give me the wrong ones, so I just opened every box of what he called Gardners to play safe. But the Scorpion had told the truth there. The ten thousand rounds he showed me were all for the Gardner gun.

I paid him half the money, and bade him send the cartridges down to the whaleboat before noon. Then he could sit on 'em till I came aboard, when I'd pay him the rest. I had to trust him that far. I told the Scorpion if he tried any game on, that Ibrahim-el-Kaid would surely cut his throat before he was a month older. The Scorpion turned to at the ammunition, and I slanted away to buy the dynamite.

I'D A HARDER job finding the dynamite than I had finding the Scorpion. 'Twas the middle of the afternoon when I got hold of it. I bought fifty sticks, complete with caps and fuses, from a joskin named Abraham.

I paid more than they were worth. Man dear, there was no beating Abraham down. He stuck to his price like a barnacle to a ship's plate. 'Twas getting late and I'd small time to argue. So I let it go after a bit of talk and paid him his own price.

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I carried the sticks down to the whaleboat myself. I could have got Old Ramon to help me, but I didn't dare have him leave the whaleboat with no one aboard. The beach-combing Tangerines would have stripped her of all but her rivets else.

Three trips I made of it. I wanted Abraham to carry the caps and fuses for me, but he vowed he wouldn't touch 'em. He didn't mind selling 'em, he said, but carrying them through the streets of Tangier was another course entirely. So I had to make an extra trip for the fuses. 'Tis no pleasant thing to carry high explosives through crowded streets, and I sweated blood on all three trips, I can tell you.

When the explosives were safe aboard and the Scorpion paid for his cartridges, I told Old Ramon I'd some more business in Tangier, and I went up to a café and ate a good meal. I'd no manner of right to do it. I should have put to sea soon as possible, but I needed that meal. There was cold grub aboard the whaleboat, but I wanted coffee and something hot. Man dear, I was hungry! Besides, Diego and his bride hadn't hove in sight yet. I had to wait for 'em.

When the meal was done, I slanted away for the dock. I got into the street, and my cap was near blown off my head. The wind had freshened amazing. Out of the sou'-west it was, and blowing stronger every minute. Dust was flying about in clouds, and I rubbed my eyes and swore.

I'D NOT gone halfway to the dock when I heard a shout behind me. I looked back, and there was Levira the Scorpion and one of the flunkies from the Spanish Consulate dancing about and calling for the police. Both joskins were pointing at me, and people were beginning to look. There was naught to do but run for it. I was paying up for that meal, and no merry jest. But the Scorpion would pay for peaching. Ibrahim-el-Kaid would attend to that.

I put on full speed ahead and raced for the dock. I looked back as I turned a street corner, and there was quite a crowd astern. Three policemen, Levira and the flunky were in the lead, and all bawling for me to stop. I speeded up a turn or two, I can tell you.

"Send Old Ramon and Diego are ready!" said I to myself. I misdoubted they wouldn't be, though. Spaniards never are, as a rule. But if Diego and his wife hadn't reached the whaleboat by now, there'd be no more waiting. They could just stay in Tangier. I turned another corner, and now 'twas a straight course for the dock. This street was crowded, and I had a collision. I knocked one Moor endways. Fat he was, like a bundle of cushions, and he went down with a yelp. I tripped up a camel-driver who tried to stop me, and he scrambled to his feet and ran after me with the rest. 'Twas all very exciting.

When I reached the shore end of the dock, I saw Old Ramon and Diego sitting on the string-piece and smoking cigarettes, calm as could be.

They looked up when they heard the roar of the crowd, and I will say they knew what to do then. I'd no breath left for orders, but they needed none. Diego jumped down into the boat and Old Ramon ran to cast off. I reached the whaleboat fifty yards ahead of the crowd. Diego hoisted away on the jib, and I set the fores'l, while Old Ramon shoved off and jumped into the stern. Man dear, 'twas close! There weren't ten yards of open water between the stern of the whaleboat and the dock when the crowd reached the spot where she'd been moored.

The policemen and the Scorpion shook their fists at us and waved their arms, but I'd small time to pay attention. With the wind that was blowing I'd all I could do to handle the boat. I knew we were out of danger from the police. They'd not be able to follow us in that breeze.

"Where's your wife?" I asked Diego between breaths.

He lifted a corner of the tarpaulin covering the dynamite. There, sitting on the bottom-boards, was as pretty a black-eyed bit as I've seen. She looked at me solemn, then smiled at Diego. She'd a good color, and even if she wasn't standing, I could see her lines weren't half-bad. Diego had made a good choice.

Her name was Dolores, Diego said, and she loved him very much. I told her she'd got a good man, but I'd small time to say more, for there was work to do.

When the whaleboat had made enough northing I ordered the sheets slacked, and we stood away to the east'ard. 'Twas half a gale by now, and the whaleboat fair jumped along.

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II

THE wind blew stronger and stronger. Off Ceuta, when we had to head sou'east, we got into trouble. Ye'll mind the whaleboat was sprit-rigged, and I dropped the fores'l all along the sprit to reduce the pressure. The sail had no reef-points, and that was all I could do. As I say, it spelled trouble off Ceuta. Sailing on the wind and with the seas high, she'd heel to lee'ard on top of a wave, and when she went down in the trough there wasn't enough sail-area aloft to catch the wind and hold her steady.

She'd roll to wind'ard and when the next wave threw her up and the wind hit the sail fair 'twould almost turn her over. I looked for the mast to go any minute. It cracked and strained fearsome. I bade Diego hoist the fores'l again. It held her steadier, but she heeled more.

After a bit it began to thunder and lighten till it sounded like the end of the world to the two Spaniards. They minded me of a girl I knew once. She never liked thunderstorms, and ye always had to put your arm round her to hearten her up. I'd always go see her if I thought one was coming. But all I could do to the Spaniards was swear at 'em.

The seas came aboard, and there was soon six inches of water slopping to and fro on the bottom-boards. Old Ramon commenced to pray. He always did that when things looked black. Diego and his wife were bailing hard.

"Bail! You Ramon!" I bawled.

But he only hauled out a rosary and began pattering prayers. As I say, I always respect a man's religion, but that whaleboat was no church, and I bade Ramon turn to.

"Of what use?" said Ramon. "We shall drown. The boat is filling."

"Ye may drown if ye like," I said, "but ye'll not take me along if I can help it. Pick up that bailer and turn to!"

But he was too scared, and I had to stick him in the leg with the boat-hook before he'd listen to reason.

Fast as the three of 'em bailed, the water came in faster. The dynamite, fuses and cartridges were safe from damp. They were all in water-tight boxes. So the only thing we had to think about was sinking. 'Twas black night by now, and what with the storm and all, things looked scary.

I'd a compass to steer by and a small lantern for a binnacle-lamp. I could see all right, enough to keep Old Ramon at work anyway. I did not have to watch Diego Valdez. He'd served in the Spanish navy, and when it came to the pinch he'd work without being watched.

I'd no idea how far off-shore we were. The African coast has few lights. I couldn't have seen 'em if they'd been there, though. The air was filled with flying spray, and it stung like sand. There was never a whimper out of Dolores. She'd nerve, had that girl.

AFTER a bit I began to get uneasy. I misdoubted if we had offing enough, so I bade Old Ramon slack the sheets, and we slanted away to the east'ard. Two hours later the wind dropped of a sudden. Old Ramon thanked the saints and sat down on a thwart. But I knew what was coming. When a gale stops like that it means just one thing: 'Tis a young hurricane and no real gale at all.

"Lower away fores'l and jib!" I bawled. "No, No, you Jack Spaniards! Don't clew up the fores'l! I want no sail on the mast! Lower it! Handsomely now!"

"Why? Why?" shouted Old Ramon, and he grabbed the downhaul. "The wind has stopped."

"And you call yourself a sailor! Don't ye know we're in the storm center? The wind will come out of the nor'east after a bit!"

That put the fear of Hades into their hearts, and they worked fast. Overhead, I could see a star or two and flying scud. Puffy squalls there were, but I knew there'd be wind enough to make up the lack before a great while. I'd no mind to run for it. We had to ride it out; we'd be ashore else. And sailing on the wind any longer was impossible. The whaleboat had been taking it green over the bows, and an hour more of it would sink her.

We unstepped the fore and mainmasts, and lashed them, the sails, oars and boat-hook together for a sea-anchor. Then I made a heaving-line fast to the sea-anchor, and we shoved it overside. We'd none too much line—only eighteen fathom, but I paid it all out and knotted the end to the painter with a single-sheet bend. I knew that would hold till all was blue.

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Then we took the tarpaulin and spread it from the bow almost to the sternsheets. We bailed the whaleboat out, too. We'd hardly gotten the boat ready when the wind struck us. Out of the nor'east it came, and harder than before. I was thankful I hadn't held on for Dar-el-Dana.

We'd only one lantern, and set it in the sternsheets and lashed it fast. The whaleboat might or might not have been in the track of steamers, but 'twas as well to take all precautions. We rode to the sea-anchor well enough. Now and again she'd ship water over her gunwale, but we hove it overside as fast as it came aboard.

I didn't know how much sternway the whaleboat was making, but I had hopes the gale would blow itself out before we struck the beach. If it didn't, we'd all be smashed up proper. The surf during a storm on the African coast is fearsome, and a man stands no chance at all.

I didn't feel very cheerful, and I reached for my mouth-organ, meaning to play a tune or two. Oh, ay, I've a great love for music, and I can play the mouth-organ more than a bit. I'd no more than stuck my hand in my pocket when I heard the scratch of a match behind me. Ye'll mind we were all four under the tarpaulin. I turned round quick, and there was Old Ramon Gonzalez sitting on the box of fuses and lighting a cigarette! He'd just scratched a match on the box! I went cold.

I made shift to reach Old Ramon, and I pulled that cigarette out of his mouth and hove it into the Mediterranean.

"D'ye want to blow us up?" I bawled.

"I want to smoke," said Old Ramon, and he looked at me sulky. "I have not tasted tobacco since we left Tangier."

"Ye'll taste Hades if ye try that on again!" I said. "There'll be no smoking in this boat till we reach Dar-el-Dana and all the cargo's ashore. Mind that now."

He grumbled and swore, and made as if to light another cigarette. But I promised to drop him overboard and have done with him once for all if he didn't let be. He stopped then, and put away the cigarette. I took away his matches after that. He was no man to trust, the old fool!

DIEGO VALDEZ—he and his wife had been sound asleep in each other's arms—woke up and wanted to know what all the row was about. I told him, and he shook his fist under Old Ramon's nose and told him plain he'd no sense at all. Diego knew what high explosives were, if Old Ramon didn't. Old Ramon answered back, and they had quite a tea-party together. I let 'em quarrel. 'Twould keep 'em contented, and that's a great thing when there's naught special to do.

Of a sudden, I heard the foghorn of a vessel. I stuck my head out and listened. The foghorn sounded again. The vessel was to the east'ard, but I could see no lights. She blew once more, close this time. Diego and Ramon crawled out beside me, and Ramon turned on his prayers, for that foghorn sounded too close to be sanitary. Then, out of the night and the flying spindrift, lifted green and red sidelights and a white light over all.

I saw those lights, and they were close aboard. I grabbed Diego's sheath-knife out of his belt and cut the lashings of the lantern. I waved the lantern like mad, and shouted all I knew. On came the vessel, and straight for us, seemingly. She wasn't coming slow at all. The wind was driving her along faster than I can tell it. Man dear, if she ever hit the whaleboat with all that dynamite aboard we'd go to glory one-time!

"The blasted lookout's asleep!" said I, and I waved the lantern harder than ever.

But she came on, and I was all ready to make a jump for it, when the port light vanished and the green showed fair. The next second the vessel shot past our stern so close in I could see the face of the man at the wheel in the dull glow from the binnacle. I doused the lantern quick. The vessel was a gunboat, and Spanish from the look of her.

A faint hail came from her bridge as she flashed by, then she whistled, and *bang! bang!* went a rapid-fire gun. Just there or thereabouts was no place for us. The Spanish gunboat had been sent after us, that was sure. But there was no chance to escape. The masts were both overside, and we just had to sit and take what was coming. The hurricane was strong as ever, and that was a blessing. In the darkness and the storm and all, the gunboat might not be able to find us.

She switched on her searchlight, and I could see the big white beam swing about and about. It never struck us once. It

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swung by not ten feet above our heads. If the masts had been stepped we'd have been nabbed. As it was, we'd an unpleasant time of it for half an hour. The gunboat loosed off her rapid-fires now and again, but the projectiles all went wide.

The Spaniards tried to come back the way they'd come, but they'd overrun us too far, and after a bit we lost sight of 'em. Diego and Old Ramon, for all they were Spanish themselves, cursed that gunboat proper. It would have gone hard with them if they'd been caught—Diego Valdez special. He'd left the Spanish navy without his discharge papers. Oh, ay, he deserted, and that's a thing calling for strong punishment.

III

WE RODE to the sea-anchor the rest of the night. I couldn't help but compliment Dolores on her courage. Man dear, she'd been the brave one! Never a squeak, even when the gunboat loosed off at us. The hurricane blew itself out before dawn, and I turned to Old Ramon and Diego and got in the sea-anchor. The east was light before we had the masts stepped, and I could see a heavy line of black astern that wasn't the horizon. 'Twas land, no less, and the whaleboat was close in. We worked, I can tell you.

The sea was still high, but the wind was light and westerly. When the sun rose, it showed no gunboat in sight, the surf breaking white on the beach two miles away and the houses of a town behind. An hour's more drifting and naught could have saved the whaleboat.

"Targa," said Old Ramon, when he made out the town.

"Targa, is it?" I said. "Then we'll just be getting out of here quick. Slack away fore and mainsheets there! Clear the jib-sheet! She's foul o' the anchor fluke! That's well! Belay all! We'll be in Dar-el-Dana by noon if the wind holds."

The wind held. We'd not made two miles when a smudge of smoke raised up to the north'ard. I'd an idea it was that blasted gunboat, and I headed inshore a bit. In ten minutes the smudge was a cloud with a black blot underneath. Then I caught a flash, and a shell ricochetted over the wave-tops to starboard. I ordered the sheets slacked and stood inshore.

The beach was a mile away by now, and the gunboat four miles astern. On account of her draft she couldn't approach the shore closer than two miles, but at that range she could blow us up with her shells. There was naught to do but beach the whaleboat and trust to luck for saving the cargo.

Through the breakers we went, shells dropping all about us, and me twisting the tiller all I knew. A steering-oar was the thing, but I hadn't it, and I misdoubted if the tiller was strong enough. It wasn't. Diego and Old Ramon at the oars did their best to hold the boat bow on to the breakers. But it was no go. At the last line of breakers she broached to, and naught that we could do would bring her back. A big wave caught her, capsized her, and the next second I was spitting water out of my mouth.

Old Ramon, with never a thought for any one but himself, struck out for the beach like a water-dog. *Rip! Crash!* A six-pounder shell threw up a column of water close to him. Old Ramon bellowed like a steam-siren and dove through a breaker. Dolores, cool as a refrigerator-ship, was swimming alongside Diego ahead of me. She could swim, could Dolores! I'd all I could do to catch up with them.

'Twas not a hard pull to get ashore, and we made it easy, the four of us. Old Ramon took the ground first, and he scuttled up quick behind the sand-hills. We three came ashore together, and Diego and Dolores ran after Old Ramon. I didn't follow. I saw a dozen Riffs coming along hot-foot, and I knew I'd a chance to save the whaleboat and cargo.

Ye'll mind the cases were all lashed fast between the thwarts. I yelled out in Arabic that the Spaniards were trying to destroy a cargo of Ibrahim-el-Kaid, the Basha of Dar-el-Dana, and that was enough for them. Down they ran, willing as could be. I waded out toward the whaleboat, headed into a wave, and swam for it. The Spaniards aboard the gunboat were sprinkling the shells about very industrious, and for all their marksmanship was poor, it seemed a month before I reached that whaleboat.

I GOT round by her bow, took a long breath and went under her. Man dear, I misdoubted if I'd ever find that painter! I laid hold of it before

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my breath gave out, and I praised Heaven when I touched that single-sheet bend. The heaving-line and painter were still knotted together. I came to the surface, and hauled away till I had the end of the heaving-line. I was under water mostly, but I managed to take two half-hitches around my shoulder. Then I struck out for shore.

The Riffs had waded out far as they could, and they grabbed me quick when I came near and lifted me up. I bade 'em tail on to the line and haul. They turned to, and the whaleboat hit the beach in a hurry. She did not hit easy at all, and my heart went into my mouth. Dynamite is no thing to be rough with. As it was the boat was stove, but that mattered naught, so long as the cargo did not blow up. We righted the boat, but we'd no time to haul her up and rock the water out. I just cut the cargo lashings, and we got those cases on the beach and up behind the sand-hills one-time, I can tell you.

The gunboat kept on with her target-practise till we were all safe with the cargo behind the sand-hills. Then she ceased firing and steamed away to the west'ard. She'd left her mark behind. The way those shells had ripped up the beach was fearsome. I sat down on a case of cartridges and told the Riffs what fine lads they were. They'd done well, those jossers. 'Tis no easy thing to save a capsized boat when the shells are bursting close in, and ye can lay to that!

They were glad enough to help, they said. They'd small love for the Spaniards, and Ibrahim-el-Kaid was a protector of the helpless and would give a reward. I told 'em he would, and bade 'em hunt up camels to carry the cargo to Dar-el-Dana. They slanted away, and Diego Valdez, Dolores and Old Ramon came and sat down beside me. They'd kept out of sight before. I'd an idea that handling those cases was too unsanitary a job for them.

"Hernando Levira," said Diego Valdez, after a bit, "will be very angry to know that we escaped. He set great store by his daughter."

"His daughter!"

"Of course, señor, you did not know, but Dolores is Hernando Levira's daughter."

"No, I didn't know, and if I had I'd never have given you permission to get married. Not this trip! You've come near fixing things, Diego. Levira is the man I bought the cartridges from. We'd never have been chased at all if you hadn't got married. But why did the Scor—Hernando and the police chase me? Can you explain that?"

"But, señor," said Diego, "I did not know who you would do business with in Tangier. You said nothing, and I did not ask. I went at once to Levira's home and met Dolores while her father was doing business in his shop. He was very busy, and we came away without being seen and were married."

"You've me to thank for keeping him busy," I said. "If I had not bargained with Levira such a long time, you'd never have done it so easy. Go on."

"I brought her to the boat," went on Diego, "after the cargo was stowed and the men were gone, and hid her under the tarpaulin. Two—three—four hours later came a policeman. He asked questions about Dolores of all at the dock. No one saw me bring Dolores. I knew I was safe, but the policeman might search. So I said I saw Dolores with an Englishman. Then he asked what the Englishman looked like, and—forgive me, señor—I answered with the words God put into my mouth. I was afraid, señor, and I did not know what I said; but when the policeman had departed and I was wiping my face, then Ramon said that I had described you exactly and there would be trouble. Señor, I am very sorry."

"Ye may well be. Your marriage might have cost Ibrahim a pretty penny. I'm not thinking he'll like it."

"But you will not tell!"

And both Diego and Dolores looked at me pleading and pitiful. They'd not thought before what Ibrahim-el-Kaid might think of it. Ibrahim was a regular Aberdonian when his pocket was in danger. Well, well, what could a man do? It wasn't Dolores' fault that her father went yelping to the police and the Spanish Consul, and had us chased by a gunboat.

No, no, she wasn't to blame, and if anything happened to her husband, as it certainly would if I told Ibrahim, 'twould doubtless break her heart. So I just told 'em both what you'd have said yourself under the same circumstances.

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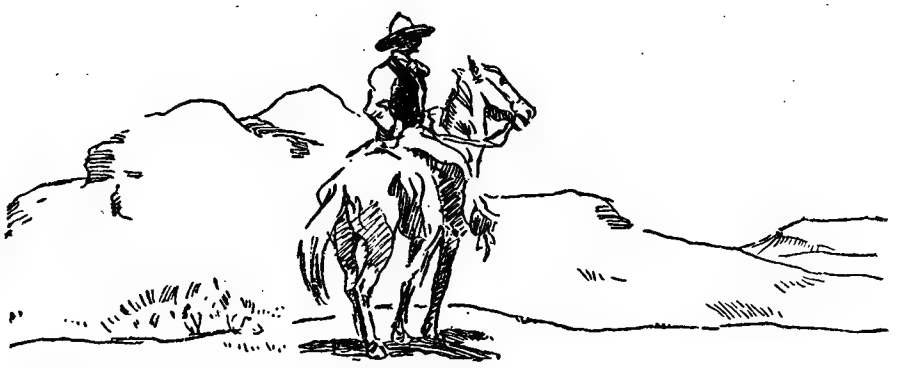

A THOUSAND DOLLARS A MILE

A TALE OF A BANDIT AND A LADY

by GEORGE FREDERIC STRATTON*

BALMY ROCKCLIFFE loped easily along the trail which led from Larrinta around the boulder-strewn, brush-tangled foothills of the Wasatch Mountains into Rawhide. When he reached the opening where the torrent of the Seven Troughs Canyon strewed a fan-shaped hill of rubble on the bench, he reined in to a clump of cottonwoods and dismounted. Grasping a tuft of bunch-grass, he rubbed the sweaty dust from his mare's belly and legs; for Balmy had the fine consideration for past performance and future demand which always kept his saddle outfit in prime condition.

With a glance of satisfaction and a slap of commendation he roped the mare to a limb, and climbing a hog-back ridge, bordering the canyon, glanced along the trail over which he had come. His view extended to the horizon, a contracted distance, because of an abrupt dip of the bench down to the lower level of the Larrinta valley. Not a living creature was in sight, and seating himself on a boulder, he rolled a cigarette, caring little that, from the lower plain, his figure was distinctly silhouetted against the snow-capped Mojada Mountain.

Balmy—he had almost forgotten his real name—had been so designated because of his unfailing and almost tender courtesy to men or women with whom his profession or his pleasure put him in contact. He said that harsh language or demonstration was a waste of effort when a man carried a reliable .45, or perhaps two, to do his talking for him.

Women who were wise enough to travel with but moderate jewelry would say, after the shock of contribution to Balmy's treasury had passed, that it was a pleasure to be robbed by such a man. And it is recorded that on the occasion of his relieving the passengers of the Poncho Springs stage of their loose change, he courteously invited them to dine with him at Hous Jensen's Tavern at the divide. Here his qualities as a host were so pronounced that he was cordially toasted, although my Lord Twemsley, an English tourist, added that the wish for good health and long life spring from the hope of some day meeting his host in a Court of Justice. But Balmy revenged himself by atrociously flirtatious devotion to Lady Twemsley, who sat on his right, and who did not echo the sentiments of her husband.

The sheriffs of half a dozen counties, when making inquiries about him, with big rewards in view, always spoke of him as Balmy; and they asserted, when reprovingly or admiringly discussing his exploits, that he had no nicks, indicating fatalities, on his gun. His method of expressing his disapproval of capture—the only occasion for which he pressed a trigger—was to put the ambitious captor out of commission. A fracture of the gun arm was his favorite operation.

He had rolled his third cigarette and was

*See page 632.

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fingering a match when he caught sight of a team rising through the soft purple haze that hung over the horizon. He gazed at it with lazy interest until he had assured himself that it was what he was waiting for—the Rawhide stage. Then he crept slowly down the ridge to his mare, answering her welcoming whinny with a stick of glistening candy.

He tightened the cinches and mounted, but held back in the shelter of the brush until the stage was within fifty feet. Then a touch of the spur plunged him into the road, and the gleaming, level barrel of his revolver caused Pete Rickards, the driver, who recognized the signs, to gather up his lines and pull his team onto its haunches. The next moment the mild even-toned command, "Hands up," was followed by a contrasting sharp obedience, for Rickards was experienced.

THE stage was an open, four-seated wagon, with canopy top, instead of the old Concord; and the only passenger was a girl. Balmy glanced at her, touched the rim of his hat with his revolver barrel, and as instantly aimed it again at Rickards.

"Fine day, Pete," he greeted pleasantly. "Toss out those packages!"

The driver shrugged his shoulders and groping into the kit below his seat, obeyed the order; while Balmy, statuesque, sat a dozen feet to one side. The small parcels of odd merchandise piled up in the road and finally Rickards laid a hand on the mail bag.

"Not that!" smiled Balmy. "There's nothing there for me."

"Then that's all!" grunted Rickards.

"You're calling for lead!" warned Balmy. "There's another package in there, if I *don't* see it!"

"It's only nails!" demurred the driver, and in reply a bullet from Balmy's gun clipped the canopy fringe just above Rickards head with the smiling accompaniment—"Next time it'll be a little lower, Pete, although I'd hate to be harsh with you."

Pete tossed the package out—a small burlap sack, with nail points sticking through at many places.

"Hands up, again!" warned Balmy, and he then reined his mare up to the rear seat where the girl was cringing back against the curtain. She was breathing fast; the color in her cheeks coming and going.

Balmy raised his hat and greeted her cheerily.

"Don't be alarmed, young lady. There'll be only a few moments delay and then you can proceed. Allow me to look at your pocketbook."

She opened a little leather satchel, took out a purse and handed it to him. He glanced at the contents—a five-dollar gold piece and some small change.

"You travel light!" he laughed. "Is this all the money you have?"

"It is every cent!" she replied; and the tone made Balmy look at her intently. It was full of contempt and indignation, and her face showed that those emotions had dispelled her fear. Her eyes, metallic and brown as a gun-barrel, flashed, and her young, full, red lips curved in sympathy. Even the opening of her bag had been insolently deliberate.

Balmy felt a strong glow of admiration. "You're not a Rawhide girl?" he asked.

"I am not, sir!" in firm tones.

"Visiting, I suppose?"

"I am going to Rawhide to teach school."

Balmy laughed gleefully as he dropped the purse back in her lap. "You'll need all you've got if you have to depend on Rawhide salary. They're some pin-headed down there! on money, anyway."

A glow of surprise mantled her pretty face, and she murmured, "Thank you!"

It was that which gave the finishing touch to Balmy's careless impulse to ride a few miles with her. He backed his mare away, and called to Rickards:

"Jump down here and throw that bag of nails into the back seat. Then toss the other packages back into your kit. I don't want *them*."

The driver dropped to the ground and obeyed. When he regained his seat, Balmy dismounted, tied Minx to the back rail, and jumping in alongside the girl, ordered Rickards to drive on.

The pink-cheeked, crinkly haired girl shrank back into her corner, and from beneath her prettily uplifted brows her clear, level eyes gleamed at him with a touch of scorn, which was emphasized in her curling lips.

But he laughed happily. "I suppose you think I'm butting in, considerable; but in my profession, and in this country, conventionalities are not exactly barb-wire."

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"Your profession!" she exclaimed. "May I ask what your profession is?"

"An humble endeavor at redistribution of wealth," he laughed again.

She crossed and recrossed her feet, and a dimple in each cheek betrayed the smile which scarcely showed. "You are audacious enough to give it its true name—highwayman—if you cared to."

"It is as you say," he agreed. "I'm only a small man—a beginner, at present. Later on, with success, I shall be known as a financier—an industrial developer, perhaps." There was a sharp tinge of bitterness in his voice.

Again the cool, level gleam of her eyes flashed into his. In critically estimating tones, she said:

"You are a man of good manners, and—yes—good appearance, and I should think of some education. Hasn't it occurred to you that you are missing your true vocation?"

"Not so you'd notice it," he declared lightly. "I have plenty of fine examples, although not many of them started their careers as I am starting. But their finish is the finish I am aiming at."

"I do not understand," she murmured.

"Hardly likely that you do," he agreed. "But I should like to explain; to tell you what no man knows about me." Without waiting for her assent, he went on. "There isn't much to it. My father was one of those who went on to wild land under an agreement with a Western railroad. The Company never kept its agreements; and after farms were cleared and homes built, after all the hardest, cruelest work for men and wives had been done, the railroads bought legislatures, invented technicalities, twisted its own laws, dodged its own liabilities and reclaimed the lands.

"There were troubles, of course, and among others, my father was shot. My mother was turned out without one dollar, and with four kids to care for. She starved to death earning food for us, and we went adrift in 'Frisco; but the gentlemen hold-ups prospered. They clawed wealth wherever they could claw laws—wealth such as no other men in the country at that time equaled. They rose to honor; one of 'em went to the U. S. Senate. Splendid examples, those! I'm just getting in training for the same fine, prosperous kind of stunt. It's the sure development of this, if a man takes care of himself."

His eyes were smiling, but his square, strong forehead, the set of his jaws, and the hard, firm lines of his mouth showed how deeply imbedded in his nature the simple, commonplace story was.

There was a sympathetic quiver of her lips as the girl persisted——

"You are looking at it the wrong way; at the wrong examples. You know—you know well, that there are better lives than those; better ways of business."

But Balmy's earnestness was gone. The old careless reckless freedom of his life was with him again, and he laughed.

"It's influence I need, I guess. If I had such an adorable little girl as you to consult with sometimes, to scold me, I'd reform, sure!"

She shrank farther back into her corner, her eyes filling with alarm, and the scornful curves again flitting about her pretty mouth.

"I'll have to drop off directly, and I must have something to remember you by. I sure must!" He slipped a ring from his finger, a magnificent emerald clustered with pearls, and tossed it into her lap.

"Exchange with me," he begged, and pointed to the plain little ring on her finger, a simple chased gold band with a single small ruby. As she hesitated, he added:

"Don't be afraid! It is an honest ring. It struck my fancy when I saw it in Straassburg's store in Denver, and I was fool enough to pay good money for it. But I'd rather have that little ruby, now!"

His request sounded to her like an order, and trembling, remembering that he was a forceful, if courteous, highwayman, she slowly drew off the ring and dropped it in his hand.

AND at the moment, even as he was squeezing it over the top of his little finger, a shot rang out, followed by the strident yell, "Hands up!" Balmy clutched his revolver, which he had laid on the seat beside him, but his brain worked as quick as an automatic.

A dozen feet away, on a sorrel pony, sat the new "professional," his face masked and his gun leveled; and Balmy saw that the slightest deviation of a bullet intended for him would strike the girl. So his hands went up, for the first time in his eventful career; and although his jaws were set in fury he couldn't risk gun-play with so great a hazard.

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It was almost a duplicate of his own work. Rickards was ordered to throw out the packages, which he began to do, with unrestrained expressions of disgust. The girl had sat with her hands clasped in front of her, and now Balmy felt one of those hands stealing softly down by his side. She felt for the revolver, slipped it across her lap to her right hand, and from her hip—her knee—fired. With a yell, the new hold-up man dropped his gun and his arm.

"Winged, by heaven!" shouted Balmy. He grasped the revolver from the girl, fearing that the other man's left arm might come into play; but that gentleman drove a spur into his horse and dashed down the trail, his right arm hanging helpless. Balmy half raised his weapon, but lowered it again with a smile. It was not his code to fire on an unarmed and wounded man. As he gazed at the flying figure, wondering who it was, he heard a rustle beside him. The girl had leaped to the ground, and she flew to the revolver which the wounded man had dropped, grasped it and pushed it into Rickards's hand, nodding suggestively at Balmy.

But Rickards was covered instantly, and at Balmy's "Drop it!"—hard, and this time full of meaning—again he tossed the revolver into the road. Then Balmy wheeled on the girl, his eyes gleaming with fierce admiration.

"You're a sure star shot!" he exclaimed. "That was a shot that I'd have been proud of. Just enough and not too much. Now, why didn't you get me that way? Why put it up to Pete?"

She was steadying herself by the stage wheel, and Balmy marveled at the color in her cheeks, the pouting of her full lips, the brilliancy of her eyes, defiantly scintillating. He stepped closer.

"You drove off one hold-up; why not two?"

"It was a chance shot!" she gasped. "If I had fired at you, it might have gone closer."

There was mockery in the shining depths of her eyes—a challenge. In a flash his arm went round her, his great muscles, tense as bronze, held her with a clasp that a grizzly could not have broken, and he kissed her fairly and passionately. Then, releasing her, and without a word, he mounted his mare and galloped back down the trail.

Once only did he glance back. She was still standing by the wheel, gazing at him. With a swing of his hat he dug in his spurs and galloped on, wondering at himself; for Balmy, the Road-Agent, had had experiences with women and come out unscathed. None had stirred him as had this little country school-teacher.

FIVE miles of the trail slipped under Minx's hoofs. Then, with an unusual oath, Balmy pulled her onto her haunches. He snatched his hat from his head, dashed it to the ground, and as he wiped his hand across his forehead, from which the sweat had started, he half yelled: "Hell! That kiss cost me thirty-five hundred dollars!"

For he knew that the innocent looking bag of nails contained the package of currency for the paymaster of the Seven Troughs Mining Company, and he had left that bag at the feet of the girl!

"I've come nearly five miles and Pete's driven like hell and made as much more. He'll be in Rawhide before I can see his dust."

He let his mare take her own gait. "It's always a woman," he muttered. "From the days of that old wrestler in the Eden Ranch, down to—to this afternoon, a woman's at the bottom of every mischance to a man." Then with a smile, he added, "and of every streak of luck, perhaps." And as he jogged along, his growls at his loss mellowed to a gleam of hungry longing as the Girl blotted out the Gold.

"I wonder!" he muttered, with flashing eager eyes, "if a judicious display of ammunition would persuade some parson to mistake her No for Yes, if I stole her?" But the accompanying smile had a tinge of bitterness, and of doubt and indecision—enough to flavor, as the cooking recipes put it.

A week later he was eating a meal of frijoles and canned tomatoes in Bed-Rock-Steve's tavern at the mouth of Opex Canyon. Steve slipped before him a copy of the *Rawhide Weekly Gazette*, and on the front page Balmy saw a three-column headline report of his latest exploit:

THE RAWHIDE STAGE HELD UP TWICE ON THE SAME DAY

THIRTY-FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS SAVED BY THE NEW SCHOOL-MISTRESS

She Drives Off an Unknown Hold-up with a Revolver and the Notorious Balmy Rockcliffe with a Kiss

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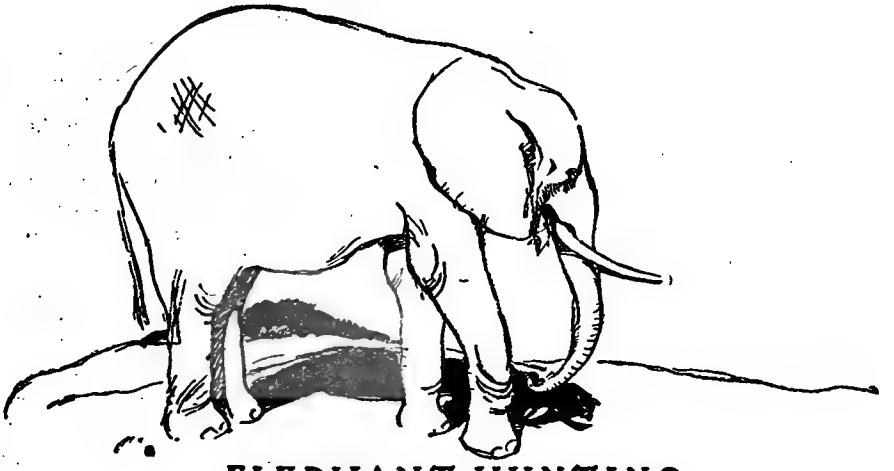
Balmy's eyes glimmered with fierce, almost uncontrollable rage as he saw the reflection—perhaps unmeant—on the girl. He chuckled with joy as he read, farther down, that the Seven Troughs Company had presented her with two hundred and fifty dollars for saving their pay-bag; but a second glance at the headlines again turned his blood into a boiling torrent of indignation.

"That's Pete's version!" he growled, fiercely. "And that little sawed-off prairie-dog of an editor didn't know enough to ask her about it; or else he saw too good a joke to be left out. The joke's on me, all right; and I don't mind that—much. But to put it on the Girl! Hell! I'll correct that little coyote's sense of humor. I'll send him a letter with the right story, an' if he doesn't publish that and eat his own yarn, he'll eat lead. Sure!"

And he sent it—with the desired effect.



ELEPHANT-HUNTING FOR A LIVING

By WALTER GALT

THERE is a difference which is almost infinite between hunting elephants for sport, or because you need a little ready money, and hunting them to get your living at the game. Any one with ordinarily decent nerves and the necessary opportunity can do the first, and because he will hunt them where the herds are small and their haunts are well known, the danger is nothing worth writing about, and the odds for comparative success are in his favor.

But if the ever-soaring price of ivory tempts you to get your living as a hunter, ask yourself these questions before you start—and think twice before you answer:

Can you shoot straight and quickly, even with the sun blazing in your eyes?

Is your nerve unshakable and panic-proof?

Can you stand without flinching when a screaming, red-mouthed terror comes charging at you, striving to tread on you and trample you to death? And will you shoot straight then?

Have you the *wanderlust*, and can you exist for months on end without the society of your kind?

Can you march and march and march, and make your loaded men march with you, when the heat is all but insuperable, and the flies are worse even than the heat? And can you do it all on an empty stomach, and with less than half your proper share of sleep?

If the answer to those questions is in the affirmative, why, go ahead; you will discover that the work is the hardest, bar none, in the whole wide world, and that the financial reward is disproportionate; but should you be successful, it will be due solely to your pluck, skill and endurance, and you will find that other men—men, that is to

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say, who are worth knowing—will treat you with a deference that should alone make the game worth the candle.

Some of the most successful hunters have been refugees from justice, as, for instance, Cutlass the Greek, who shot two hundred and seventeen elephants in less than eighteen months; but men admired Cutlass, unscrupulous blackguard though he was. He did things that they dared not do, and they treated him until the day of his death with a deference and consideration that is frequently denied to men of unblemished record.

The fact that it is impossible to get a living as an elephant-hunter without breaking at least one law renders respect for the written law superfluous. It is laid down in the Game Regulations of the British East Africa Protectorate that the maximum number of elephants that any one man may shoot in a given year is three, but each man is a law unto himself once he gets into a part of the country where there are sufficient elephants left to make the game worth while.

A law or a regulation that can be applied to only one section of the community is not likely to be treated with much respect in any case. The hunter argues that the elephant is an anachronism, that he is bound to go before the march of civilization, that as a matter of fact he is going fast, and he fails to see why the colored man should snaffle all the plunder.

For fifty or sixty miles on either side of the so-called Uganda Railway it is quite easy for the Government to keep track of a white man's movements, and to know how many elephants he has shot, and exactly where he shot them. If he oversteps the mark and shoots one too many, he is roped in and fined. The process is perfectly simple because every native in the country is a potential secret-service agent, and the Government reward for information is sufficient to keep every single one of them on the alert. So the white hunter has to go farther afield.

HOW THE WANDEROBO HUNT

IT IS quite different with the Wanderobo. They are a tribe of naked savages—cannibals some of them—who live for the most part south of the Railway line, if they can be said to live anywhere at all. They have no permanent homes, and the nearest thing to a house they ever build is a rough shelter made by bending the tops of the long grass together and tying them, then they throw a few leaves and perhaps some more grass on the top of that, and the "house" is ready. They get their living solely by hunting, they are never to be found twice in quite the same place, they have positively no scruples and no respect for anything but meat and gunpowder and the Masai.

The Masai are the shrewdest tribe in that part of Africa. They feed the Wanderobo on meat for a while, and the Wanderobo, whose habits and instincts die as slowly as those of wild animals, consider themselves in a sense their vassals, just as they used to be before the British came and when the Masai terrorized the whole country. When the Masai stop feeding them and order them to pay the debt, they obey orders and take the only course they know in order to do it.

Ten or twelve of them—even twenty sometimes—band together, armed with little bows and poisoned arrows. They scour the country until they come upon a herd of elephants, and then they single out one tusker as their prey. They stalk him for days, and crawl up to him through the long grass with the patience and twice the cunning of cats. When they get near enough they fire one volley of arrows into him.

Their bows are much too feeble, and their arrows much too small to kill the elephant outright; it is the poison that does the work; and if they only succeed between them in piercing his skin in one place the elephant is doomed. They follow him, if they must, for weeks, never losing sight of him, never giving him a moment's peace or letting him sleep, and shooting at him from under cover whenever they can get the opportunity.

In the end their masters, the Masai, are the richer by two tusks, and once more the Wanderobo live for a while on the dead goats and milk and raw blood that their stomachs yearn for.

GO TO KARAMOJA

IN THIS way the once gigantic herds that roamed about the Railway zone have been thinned down almost to vanishing point, and although the sportsman who is content with the three elephants a year

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that the law allows him can still find sufficient for his purpose, there are not nearly enough of them left to make it worth the professional hunter's while.

So there are two main reasons that send the professional farther and ever farther afield: It is altogether too easy for the Government to keep an eye on him in the Railway zone, and the Wanderobo, whom the Government can not tax or count or even bring to book, have a virtual monopoly of the business.

There are parts of that country, though, where the King of England's writ does not run yet, or where it runs so slowly and so uncertainly as to be almost a negligible quantity. Karamoja is one of those districts, and up there a man may do pretty much as he likes, provided he has the pluck and resource and native wit to get there.

Up in Karamoja there are still to be found herds of elephants numbering anything from five hundred to two thousand, and there are no Government officers to impose fines or issue orders and no natives who would take the trouble to report. Getting there is the trouble.

Karamoja is a closed country. In other words, the Protectorate Government is unable as yet to administer it, through lack of funds chiefly, although a rather natural respect for the fighting qualities of the Abyssinians has something to do with it. White men are not wanted up there to stir up trouble and get killed and force an armed occupation, and if you are unwise enough to let it be known that you intend to make a hunting trip in Karamoja the Government will take pains that you do not get there.

You may possibly start, but before you have gone very far your porters will all run away, and you will find a strange unanimity among the tribes you pass in refusing to sell or give you food, either for yourself or your men, on any terms at all. You will meet game on the way, of course, but you will find it impossible to shoot sufficient for yourself and your safari of one or two hundred hungry natives.

ELEPHANT HUNTING WITH A MAXIM

THERE are two ways of overcoming the difficulty. One is to start from Abyssinia, as Lord Delamere did, and come down from the north. Lord Delamere brought a Maxim with him, ostensibly as a protection against hostile tribes, but he is always supposed to have used it on the elephants, and judging by the amount of ivory he had with him when he reached East Africa he must have done so. At all events he and Doctor Atkinson had sufficient funds as the result of the expedition to take up a hundred thousand acres of land near Naivasha and to establish a very decent-sized sawmill. They buried the Maxim somewhere to the north of Lake Baringo.

THE FEAR OF THE ABYSSINIANS

THE chief objection to that route is the Abyssinians themselves. They are warlike and well armed with modern repeating rifles, and although from their King downward they can all of them trace their ancestry back to the days of King Solomon, and might consequently be supposed to be old-fashioned, they have ultra-modern ideas on graft. By the time you have finished bribing a Raas or two, and have satisfied the greed of the lesser fry you will have very little left, either in money or goods, with which to continue your journey.

It is hard, too, to get porters in Abyssinia, and although camels and horses are procurable in almost any quantity and at reasonable prices, they are almost all of them sure to die once you get to the southward of Lake Rudolf. The Abyssinians lay claim to Karamoja, and within quite recent years —since the railway has been finished, in fact —their troops have controlled the border. Even to-day occasional patrols are to be met with, and in that contingency, if you want to keep your ivory, you must be prepared to fight for it and fight hard.

The usual and certainly the better plan is to fit out a trading expedition and make a pretense of going to Uganda. Once past Jinja, where the headwaters of the Nile go pouring down over the Ripon Falls, you must hurry northward, leaving Mount Elgon on your right. Your knowledge of how to handle men will be taxed to its utmost at this stage of the journey, for not one of the hundred or two hundred men you must have with you will want to cross the waterless desert that separates you from Karamoja.

Those of them who have not been over it before with some Arab trader have at least been told of it by the others, and of the treatment that the others received at the Arabs' hands once they were beyond the

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reach of British law. Explaining to them that you are not an Arab and that you will treat them kindly will be about as much use as talking to a herd of buffalo. You must be a leader of men—born to it, and at the zenith of your power—if you are to go over that desert anyhow but alone.

Few men who were not born with the trick of handling natives ever acquire it, and very few, comparatively speaking, are even born with it. Should you happen to be one of the lucky few, you will bully and coax and hustle your men across the desert until you reach a country where they dare not desert you for fear of the waterless tract behind them and of the hostile tribes on every hand. The natives of Karamoja would butcher them for the mere sport of it if they could catch them alone or in half-dozens at a time. You can take it easy then for a while, drilling your men and teaching them all they need to know.

The amount of ivory you will be able to carry back will depend, among other things, upon the number of porters you have with you; each man is supposed to carry only sixty pounds, but you can load them up with ninety if you know how to handle them, and especially if you "fake" your scales; if they see for themselves that a tusk weighs only sixty or sixty-five pounds, they will believe it and put down the extra exertion to the heat.

Any tusk weighing more than eighty or ninety pounds must be either cut in half or else carried between two men; it is generally better to cut it, because the natural curve of it and the uneven distribution of the weight make it a very awkward load for two men. In the days when the Arabs used that route they often took with them as many as six or seven hundred men, though they seldom came back with more than half that number. Presumably the balance was written off to "wear and tear." An Arab seldom sees the use of feeding a man who has nothing to carry, and a bullet is often less expensive than food, even in that country. It is always cheaper than a man's wages.

RON NERVE AND OTHER NECESSARIES

THE best plan, once you are up there, is to establish a permanent camp in a good central spot from which you can make hunting trips in every direction. The natives of the country, however savage and treacherous they may be, will always tell you where to find the herds, because every time an elephant falls to your gun they will be able to gorge themselves stupid on the raw flesh.

But the tracks of a big herd are so plain and unmistakable that getting on the trail will be one of your least difficulties. Following the trail up is another matter. Frightened elephants will often move as much as seventy or eighty miles in a night, and more often than not they will hustle their wounded along with them.

No two men ever agree as to which is the best rifle to use. Some are faithful to the old twelve-bore, which will almost knock down a tree with the force of its recoil, and from that to a small-bore modern repeater almost every type of gun has its advocates. But a magazine is beyond doubt a very good thing to have, and on one point at least all professional hunters are agreed: the right and only real way to shoot an elephant is to get as close to him as you possibly can before you fire. That is what you need your iron nerve for.

In the middle of a blazing hot day, when the heat haze seems to dance up and down before your eyes and the whole countryside is shimmering and humming like the cover of a boiler, elephants will stand bunched up together in any sort of shade they can find. They are always extremely short-sighted, but on very hot days they seem to be very nearly blind. Should there happen to be no wind, the most delicate sense they have—that of smell—is also out of action, and though they are never still for an instant, though they shift and shuffle to and fro, and move their trunks restlessly and ceaselessly, testing the air for the slightest taint that might betray the presence of an enemy, it is possible by walking quietly to get so close to them as almost to be able to touch them with your hand. You will not be able to do it, though, if you are a timid man.

APPROACHING THE HERD

YOU must have a picked man with you to carry your spare rifle, and he must be a man that you can depend on whatever happens to stand close up behind you and pass you either the rifle or more cartridges, whichever you happen to want; a native

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who tries to shoot when the trouble starts is useless and of course one who runs away is even worse. You must pick that native more carefully than you would pick your wife.

You need take no precautions against being seen, provided that the day is hot enough, but the snap of a twig is sufficient to betray your presence when you are within two hundred yards of the herd. Their sense of hearing is particularly acute. If a twig snaps, and one of them hears it, as one of them surely will, he will toot down his trunk just loud enough for the rest of the herd to hear. Then the whole lot, whether five or five hundred or a thousand, will swing round toward the noise, and out will go their trunks, swaying to and fro in the air like the necks of a lot of geese. They are feeling for a scent, and whether they get wind of it or not they will move off almost at once at a fast walk.

Almost the worst thing you can do when that happens is to shoot. A shot from behind, even from a twelve-bore, will hardly ever drop an elephant. You might get one of them, but you will frighten all the rest so thoroughly that it may possibly take you days to come up with them again; and a herd that has been properly scared is much more difficult to approach, even when you do catch it up. It is well, though, to remember that no animal in the world can run away from a man in the long run. Provided you are fit, and have sufficient determination, you can walk down even a herd of elephants in course of time.

If the elephants discover you or suspect your presence before you can get close enough to them, let them go, and follow them up a few hours later, even next day, if it seems reasonably certain that they are feeding in the immediate neighborhood. Then approach them again, even more carefully than before, and get, if you can, within thirty yards of the biggest bull in the herd. If the shot is possible, aim at his knee, for an elephant that is hit in the knee will go down and won't get up again. You can finish him at your leisure.

Wherever you shoot him, though, and whether he drops or not, be ready to shoot again on the instant. Glance over your shoulder to make sure that your gun-bearer is where he ought to be, single out the next biggest bull, and fire at him, aiming at the knee again if possible. The moment the first shot is fired the whole herd will stampede, screaming and trumpeting and milling round and round at a terrific pace, looking for the danger, cows searching for their young and calling to them and the bulls struggling to force their way to the outside of the crush in order to protect the cows.

In less than a minute the herd will be off, but during that minute you have a chance to do some heavy execution. They never move at any other gait than a walk, even when they are stampeding, but a good horse would be hard put to it to catch them for all that.

FIRST AID TO THE INJURED

AS A GENERAL rule until the herd moves off you are not in any particular danger, although the noise and the sight of so many hundred monsters thrashing about may give you the contrary impression. But among the elephants that you have hit there is almost sure to be at least one who is still on his legs, and, whether he has been hit hard or not, he will try to follow the herd. If he succeeds, well and good; you can follow him afterward, and if you do follow you will surely get him. For the present the herd will help him along, taking turns to lean against him, one on either side, to support him. But if he is unable to catch up, he will call to the retreating herd, and then —look out for trouble!

Two or three bulls and perhaps even a female or two will turn back to help him, and you will need all your nerve and all your skill and all the cold five-o'clock-in-the-morning courage you possess to get you out of the difficulty.

Every one of those elephants will charge. Your business is to shoot—shoot straight and quickly, but, before everything else, keep on shooting. They will come straight at you, the wounded one and the ones that came to help him, trunks out, ears up, screaming like ten thousand devils! And the worst of them will be the one they came to help; he will head the charge, and the pain of his wound will make him more savage and more reckless than the others.

SHOOT!

WHAT you need to know then is that an elephant hates noise more than anything else in the world, and particularly a sharp noise. At the last second he will not

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face the noise and flash of your rifle, provided that you keep on shooting. You will need all your nerve, though, and every ounce of self-control you have to help you believe it. Pray your God in that last second to make you believe it, for that knowledge and nothing else will save you. If you try to run, you will be done for before you even turn to run, for an angry elephant moves much more quickly than you can, and his trunk licks out like a flash of lightning.

You must stand right there and face them—five or perhaps six screaming, stamping horrors! They seem at least twice their real size with their huge ears up above their heads and their wicked little red eyes and the huge red cavern of a mouth. Their game is to trample on you; your game is to shoot and shoot and keep on shooting!

When you have felt the hot breath of one of them on your face, you have learned what fear feels like; when you have heard the scream of a wounded elephant two yards off, you have passed beyond the gates of fear into a sensation that is nameless. But stand! And keep on shooting! Shoot straight if you can, but shoot! Theirs is a bluff—they won't really face it. A buffalo will, or a rhino, and sometimes even a lion, but an elephant never.

One will go down, and then another, but there are more behind; snatch your second rifle from the bearer, and drop the other for him to pick up and load, but don't waste a second over it. Shoot! That's the whole secret. When an elephant goes down, let him alone, he won't get up again, he'll lie where he is until you come and finish him.

The most dangerous of all is an elephant that looks sick and turns sideways as though he had had enough of it; don't waste time watching him; shoot him! He'll tackle you when you're busy with one of the others; he'll rush in from the flank and settle you before you know he's coming, so give him a bullet through the heart the moment he shows his broadside.

When they are all down, go round at once and give them the *coup de grace* as quickly and as mercifully as they would have given you yours. They would have struck you down and stamped you into the ground, and in less time than it takes to electrocute a man you would have gone to your own particular Valhalla. There would have been no lingering death for you, so grant them the same favor.

A wounded elephant is one of the most pitiable sights in all the world, because his strength and size and weight only serve to increase his helplessness when he is down, and his intelligence increases his fear and misery. Kill him quickly and have done with it.

THE NATIVE PITS

THE natives of that country kill elephants by means of traps. They dig pits—often as deep as thirty feet—wide enough at the top for an elephant to fall into, but narrowing to a point as they go down. They dig a series of these pits, rather close together, and when they are ready they drive a herd of elephants over them.

The useless and disgusting slaughter that follows is almost unbelievable. Tuskers and mothers and young go tumbling headlong into the traps, and there the natives leave them until the poor brutes are so weakened by hunger and thirst and cramp that they can scarcely even struggle, then they jump on their backs from above and finish them with spears.

If those infernal elephant pits could be put an end to, and the Wanderobo further south could be deprived of their bows and arrows, the white man might safely be allowed to shoot elephants for a living without the slightest risk of their extinction. The white man's rifle, under reasonable and properly enforced restrictions, would do no more than keep pace with the natural reproduction of the species.

The Government confiscates all female ivory found in any one's possession, so there is no profit in shooting females, but the native pits make no distinction between male or female, or young. As things are at present, the law is supposed to restrain the white man, while the native does what he likes. As a matter of fact quite a number of white men evade the law, and the elephant is disappearing ten times more quickly than he need do.

RUNNING DOWN THE HERD

BUT to return to the hunt. Your porters will have come running from the camp when they heard the sound of shooting. Set them to cutting out the tusks of the elephants you have shot, and with the

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best half-dozen of them set out to track down any wounded member of the herd that may have got away.

This is the hardest and most exhausting part of elephant hunting, for a wounded elephant can move over a surprising lot of country in twelve hours; the others help him. But you, being a man, can wear him down. You will come upon him somewhere in the rear of the herd, supported most likely between two others, and certainly with one or two friends near him.

All three of them will get wind of you the moment you see them, for having been thoroughly frightened they are thoroughly on the alert. If the wounded elephant is strong enough, they will take him on again at a pace which will soon leave you miles behind, but if you keep on and do without your sleep you are bound to come up with them in the end.

However weak the wounded one may get, the other two will not desert him until the end—until he is actually dead, or so near to death that their help can be of no more good to him. Sometimes they will round on you suddenly, and charge, screaming, until they drop; sometimes they will stand by the wounded one to defend him with their bodies; but, whatever happens, you will surely have three elephants to deal with, and not just one wounded one; and you will also find yourself a day's march, or possibly two days' march, away from camp without food or bed or shelter. And the mosquitoes will bite you till you run blood.

As for food, an elephant's feet, or his heart, are not to be despised, especially when you have earned a hunter's appetite. You will be obliged to sleep up in a tree among the mosquitoes, and shelter you must go without; for it is obviously better to send one man back to camp to tell your crowd to come on and join you than to go back yourself. You are nearer your herd of elephants than your camp is, if only by a day's march, and in hunting elephants, as in everything else, it is best never to lose sight of the main issue. Hunt one herd until they become so wild you can no longer get within a mile of them, then find another one.

"TRADING" IN KARAMOJA

IT DOES not pay up in that country to shoot an elephant whose tusks weigh less than sixty pounds apiece, because the value of the ivory would be more than eaten up in wages and food for the porters who carry them back to civilization, but anything over sixty pounds is worth going for. Ivory is worth about two and a half dollars a pound, and some tusks weigh two hundred pounds! To set off against that, though, you have the wages of one or two hundred men to provide for, their food, clothing, blankets, and your own provisions and ammunition.

There is a living in it, but a durned hard living, and only a certain type of man can eke it out. He is a man, though, whatever else he happens to be, and he earns every cent of money that is his when he has paid his men off and replaced the wear and tear of his outfit.

Disposing of the ivory is not so very difficult. There is a tax on ivory, and you must pay that; you have a permit which sets you back to the tune of two hundred and fifty dollars and entitles you to shoot two elephants; by paying one hundred and twenty-five dollars more, you are entitled to admit that you have shot a third. The rest you must pretend that you have come by in the way of trade.

The Government will know very well that you didn't, but as nobody saw you and nobody can prove what you did, they will content themselves by collecting the tax—confiscating any cow-ivory you may have—and watching you extremely carefully next time you fit out an expedition. The wise man in East Africa takes out a license, shoots his three elephants, and then "trades" in Karamoja.

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RETAINED FOR THE DEFENSE

By HUGH PENDEXTER

"BE SEATED, Mr. Kaber," invited Ezra Stackpole Butterworth, founder of the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation, as the junior member of the legal firm of Short, Hunnewell & Kaber remained standing after making known his errand.

"Then you will accept our retainer?" eagerly asked the young attorney, sinking into a chair.

Mr. Butterworth stroked his smooth chin thoughtfully. Finally he replied:

"That is rather doubtful. The Bureau, as you well know, seldom bestirs itself in criminal cases, although there are times when our adopted troubles take on a semi-criminal phase. In the Rowe case, recently decided in our favor, the plaintiff sought to have the defendant, his double, restrained from frequenting notorious resorts, because it was established that these unsavory excursions to the underworld were part and parcel of a conspiracy to undermine the financial and social standing of our client.

"The Supreme Court has wisely held that no man can hold title to property absolutely, that he must consider the rights and welfare of others in disposing of his property. He can not burn his house or woodlands if such an act jeopardizes the safety of neighboring holdings. We now have improved on that noble precedent: no man can indulge in a freedom of action that puts in hazard the well-being of his neighbor.

"The remarkable resemblance between the litigants in the Rowe case made it an easy matter for the defendant to blast the reputation of our client. Thus, he is wisely restrained. But this Lapton affair from your office is simply a vulgar case of homicide, as I understand it. There is no redeeming feature of the unique connected with it, is there?"

"Well, maybe not," faltered Kaber, twisting uneasily beneath the keen gaze of the white-haired man at the desk.

"Huh! I thought as much from a casual glance at the headlines in the papers," mumbled Mr. Butterworth, beginning to toy impatiently with a sheaf of documents. "Impossible, my dear Mr. Kaber; utterly out of the question. We have just finished the Hitcher case, the strangest bit of dualism ever recorded in fact or fiction. Madame Hitcher retained counsel, you will remember, to defend certain suits brought against her by an alleged cousin, who claimed a half of the defendant's uncle's large estate."

"I recall the case," moodily broke in Kaber.

"Ah, but you do not know that the claimant who retained this Bureau is also Madame Hitcher, who is the victim of a dual personality. She has sued herself while laboring under her strange obsession, and by the most adroit and cunning mode of procedure has brought her other self, the defendant, to the point of signing off one-half of the large estate to her baser and

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abnormal self. I have satisfied the court and opposing counsel as to the exactness of my disclosures, and the suit has been discontinued on an *ex parte* motion in Chambers. But I shall never, I fear, convince Madame Hitcher that she was being made the victim of her other self. You can appreciate how loath I would be to take up the Lapton case when fresh from the invigorating novelty of the Hitcher suit."

"Of course, if you won't, you won't," gloomily said Kaber, rising. "But the matter is bothering us not a little, and Short will be greatly disturbed when I tell him you won't touch the case. We've been Lapton's lawyers for some ten years, but, I'm frank to say, we don't know where we're at in this affair."

"Don't know where you're at?" testily repeated Mr. Butterworth, elevating his white brows impatiently. "Why, what can there be to puzzle you?"

"First, let me briefly give you a history of the case," earnestly responded Kaber.

Mr. Butterworth struck a bell on his desk and replied:

"No. I prefer to read the newspaper notices of the tragedy. Jethro"—this to the tall, thin-faced assistant who appeared in the doorway with the precise promptness of an automaton—"fetch me the newspaper accounts of the Lapton homicide."

"Here they are, sir," replied the assistant, placing some clippings before his chief. "I got them ready when Mr. Kaber came in. I have marked them as to point of time. Number One is from the noon edition of the *Express*."

"Er-huh," muttered Mr. Butterworth, carefully adjusting his spectacles, and taking up the clipping.

The body of an unknown man was found at eight o'clock this morning on the grounds of Roland Lapton's country home at Fair Heights, by William Ross, a farm-hand employed by Mr. Lapton. Death was caused by a bullet wound through the temple. As no weapon was found near the corpse, the theory of suicide can not be entertained. The coroner has had the body removed to the morgue and will hold an inquest after the autopsy has been performed. County Detective Weldman is working on the case.

"That was in yesterday's paper," murmured Kaber.

"Next, from the three-o'clock edition of the *Herald*," went on Mr. Butterworth, picking up the second slip.

The body of the man found this morning on the grounds of the Lapton estate, just outside of Fair Heights, has been identified as that of Dietrich Bender, a well-known artist. The identification was made by Isaac Waller, a lifelong friend of the decedent. The artist and Mr. Waller have been keeping bachelor hall at the Waller house for the last month. Mr. Waller has informed the coroner that he last saw Mr. Bender at four o'clock yesterday afternoon, when the latter announced his intention of walking across to the Lapton estate and adding the finishing touches to a canvas. The canvas, containing a painting of the Lapton house and its surrounding spacious lawns, was picked up near where the body was found by William Ross, an employee on the estate. A newspaper-man found the palette, some half dozen brushes, a palette-knife and several tubes of paint. Mr. Waller is nearly prostrated from the shock.

"We now come to an extract from the five o'clock edition of the *Journal*," continued Mr. Butterworth.

Acting under orders from District Attorney Klep, County Detective Weldman arrested Roland Lapton this afternoon on the charge of murdering Dietrich Bender, the artist, whose body was found on the Lapton estate this morning. The arrest results from information furnished the coroner by several men and women, who will be called as witnesses at the inquest and who will testify before the grand jury now in session. Among these witnesses are several of the Lapton servants, who have informed the coroner that at about five o'clock yesterday afternoon their employer entered his home by a rear door.

His person and clothing, they allege, were in a disheveled condition, while his features and bearing are alleged to have presented the appearance of some great excitement. His use of the rear door was commented upon, as he was never before known to leave or enter the house that way. His strange behavior held the attention of the domestics, and they will testify among other things that he ran swiftly up-stairs to his wife's private sitting-room, which he is alleged to have entered in an abrupt and somewhat rough manner.

But the coroner and the district attorney attach the most weight to the statement made by one of the maids to the effect that she heard Mr. and Mrs. Lapton's voices raised high, as if both were laboring under some strong emotion. She asserts that she distinctly heard Mrs. Lapton exclaim, "What have you done?" She alleges that Lapton replied, "You'll know in the morning." At this, avers the witness, Mrs. Lapton burst into violent weeping, and repeatedly cried, "How could you? How could you?" Other servants have informed the coroner that their master and mistress have kept aloof from each other for more than a month.

Mr. Butterworth paused and fumbled his chin for the fraction of a minute in silence. Slowly extending a hand for the next clipping, he studied it carefully for a moment and then said:

"This is about the same as the *Journal*

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clipping. In concluding it states, 'The coroner has found several reliable witnesses who will swear that some two weeks ago the accused ordered the artist from his grounds and publicly threatened him with bodily harm should he discover him trespassing again.'"

"That is about as the case now stands," said Kaber. "What do you think of it, sir?" The question was both apologetic and anxious.

"Why can't your people go on with the case?" dryly asked Mr. Butterworth as an answer.

Kaber bit his lips and then awkwardly admitted:

"It's a mighty hard case, sir. Lapton, you know, absolutely refuses to say a word about his quarrel with his wife, nor will he deny or affirm that the quarrel had to do with the crime."

"And Mrs. Lapton says what?" prompted Mr. Butterworth, now folding his hands before him.

"She's as resolute in her silence as is her husband," groaned Kaber.

"Is there any other evidence which bears on the case?" inquired Mr. Butterworth, glancing at his watch.

"I am exceedingly sorry to say there is," reluctantly confessed Kaber. "The coroner, in searching the Lapton house, found a scrap of paper in Mrs. Lapton's room. The rest of the communication was doubtless burned in the open grate. This piece was found in a waste-paper basket. It contained the words, 'God help me—help us. It is too horrible to speak of, let alone placing on paper. I must come and stay with you. Roland and I are lost——' That was all the coroner could decipher."

"Thanks," smiled Mr. Butterworth. "What does Mrs. Lapton say about it?"

"The coroner learned she had packed up some of her personal belongings overnight, so he informed her of his finding the paper and questioned her about it. She readily admitted writing it, but refused to say to whom she had intended sending it. She admitted she wrote it shortly after the scene between her and her husband, but she refuses to explain why she changed her mind and tore it up. That's what is puzzling the coroner, sir. Why should she tear it up?"

Mr. Butterworth's eyes twinkled brightly.

"Did you or the coroner ever pause to consider that in packing her trunk overnight she intended leaving Fair Heights early the next day, and that the letter would be needless, as she would arrive before it could be delivered? She wrote, 'I must come and stay with you.' She wrote it while greatly perturbed."

"By George! That's so!" cried Kaber. "But why didn't she carry out her plans and go?"

"Probably because the body was discovered on the lawn," quietly suggested Mr. Butterworth.

"Will you take the case for the defense?" feverishly implored Kaber.

"You speak of a painting found near the body, or rather, the newspaper account does. Is it a completed canvas?" inquired Mr. Butterworth, ignoring the direct query.

"So far as I and the reporters could judge, it is a completed canvas," replied Kaber. "Mr. Waller says Bender painted over there for several days on first arriving at Fair Heights. It is supposed by the prosecution that he went over the day he was killed for the purpose of comparing his lights and shadows for the last time."

"Are Lapton's movements for any part of the day of the killing accounted for?"

"His wife says he went to town early in the afternoon," replied Kaber, with a slight grimace. "We know he was at home at five o'clock. I regret to add that a reputable witness will swear he saw him prowling around the Waller house at the time Mrs. Lapton says he was in town."

"You believe your client guilty," growled Mr. Butterworth, rising and reaching for his hat and stick.

"Why—er—I can't say that," faltered Kaber. "Every man is innocent, you know—extenuating circumstances if it comes to the worst—self-defense, sudden homicidal mania——"

"You believe him guilty, and you come to the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation to get him cleared by some kind of a left-handed miracle," coldly broke in Mr. Butterworth, striding to the door. "And if I believed him guilty I would not accept the case."

"You can't mean——" gasped Kaber, jumping to his feet.

"Arrange the details with Jethro as to the retainer. Furnish him with the complete antecedents of the case," directed Mr. Butterworth. "Jethro, call for me with the car at the club in two hours."

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II

"BEAUTIFUL, isn't it?" finally remarked the old lawyer, as the touring car glided along the road leading to Fair Heights. And one dark-veined hand was waved toward the glories of the wayside scenes. The first autumnal frosts had lavishly painted the deciduous trees until the highway was embowered in a blaze of beauty. A stubble of corn, or the black skeletons of dead potato-vines occasionally, in the middle distance, added a tinge of loneliness, if not desolation, to the picture.

"Beautiful, beautiful—yet sad," repeated Mr. Butterworth in the mumbling undertone he used in addressing himself.

"A fine country for a murder, sir," offered Jethro, his professional eye lighting with interest. "The locale is even better adapted, I think, to homicidal activities than the desolate, swampy expanse surrounding the Pingle house, where they found the body."

"Nonsense!" snapped Mr. Butterworth in sharp irritation. "How can you talk shop here? Haven't you any soul for the purples in that patch of cabbage? Can't your mind find delectation in contemplating the need of those firs to the right to soften and punctuate the chromatic extravagance of the hardwood ridge? Never, Jethro, allow the tainted atmosphere of the court-room to follow you into the crystal purity of the open country."

"I thought, sir, we were out here on business," meekly defended Jethro.

"Business is our objective point," moodily corrected Mr. Butterworth, "but until we arrive let us gather these gifts of nature in passing without arranging them into stage-settings for possible murders."

Thus rebuked, the assistant retired into the covert of his thoughts and, oblivious of the panorama of woods and uplands, centered his inquiring mind on the problem awaiting them. The chauffeur, long trained to dumbness, now slowed down and glanced a query at his employer.

"Is this the Lapton estate?" asked Mr. Butterworth, shaking himself clear of the last vestige of his reverie.

The chauffeur nodded, and brought the car to a buzzing standstill. Mr. Butterworth made no move to alight, but contented himself with contemplatively studying the large house, set well in from the road and surrounded by very extensive grounds.

"I believe that will do for now," he murmured. "Proceed."

But he did not lean back and resume his serene enjoyment of the countryside.

For the second time the chauffeur halted the car and waited expectantly.

Jethro, with a muttered exclamation of surprise, asked:

"Why are we back here? Did you forget something, sir?"

"I have forgotten nothing," coldly replied Mr. Butterworth. "But I could easily make out a *prima facie* case that you have forgotten much. When were you here before?"

"I thought—— Why, it isn't the Lapton house!" puzzled Jethro.

"Hardly," dryly agreed Mr. Butterworth. "This is the Waller place. This is where the dead man put up till overtaken by his fate. I will admit the resemblance between the two estates is quite remarkable."

"It is wonderful," muttered Jethro. "I doubt if twin brothers could more closely resemble each other than do the two houses and their surrounding grounds. Why, even the solitary maple, ripe with its deep reds and streaked with lighter hues, is duplicated on the Lapton estate at precisely the same distance from the house. And still there is something—a touch of something that is different."

"'Ripe with its reds,' eh?" mildly applauded Mr. Butterworth. "Not badly put, by any means, Jethro. I am pleased to detect the more esthetic notes in your character. No man should allow the daily grind of routine to rob him of his enjoyment of nature. Have you photographed the scene sufficiently to recall it?"

The assistant stared intently for a few moments, his gaze narrowing in annoyance; then he slowly replied:

"I could recall every detail a year from now. Still, there is some minor difference—a bit of discord."

Mr. Lapton nodded sympathetically and said:

"We'll go back the same way, driver. Run slow."

On reaching the Lapton estate the car was again halted, and Jethro, with brows still puckered, concentrated his remarkable gaze on the scene. As he scanned each portion of the grounds his employer could de-

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tect the hint of irritation lingering in his manner.

"Bothered a trifle, Jethro?" he gently inquired.

Wincing a bit, the assistant gruffly replied: "I shall have it all clear very shortly, sir. If you'll excuse me I'll place one picture over the other and see wherein they differ."

Then, settling back, he closed his eyes and with his mental vision began a minute scrutiny of the two estates. Accustomed to his methods and fully appreciative of his peculiar talents, Mr. Butterworth relaxed and closed his own eyes. But, unlike his assistant, his thoughts were focused on the whist game awaiting him at the club.

THE journey to town was completed without Jethro's losing the frown between his deep-set eyes. That his employer was cynically amused because of this perplexity was quite obvious; that he interpreted the crux of the puzzlement was evidenced by his dry observation:

"Perhaps if we compare the photographs of the two houses you will find the flaw. We'll drop in on the district attorney and learn something about the antecedents of the case."

"I have the history of the case from Kaber," stiffly reminded Jethro. "But I'll look at the pictures."

Their reception at the district attorney's office was coldly courteous, an assistant suspiciously receiving them and listening to Mr. Butterworth's request. No; the office possessed no photograph of the Waller place. How would such an exhibit be germane to the case? Photographs had been ordered of the Lapton grounds, but had not been received as yet. Still, as the public prosecutor was ever willing to convenience the Bureau, Mr. Butterworth was welcome to inspect the dead artist's last canvas, which was a truthful picture of the Lapton house and immediate environment.

"For lack of a photograph that will do nicely," said Mr. Butterworth. "I suppose you have been informed by Short, Hunnewell & Kaber that I am retained for the defense."

"We have been so informed," returned the assistant, shrugging his shoulders. "Rather out of your line, eh? The last time you and the chief met was in the Pingle case."

"Which we won, as we will the Lapton case," tartly added Mr. Butterworth. "The Bureau of Abnormal Litigation *never*, sir, wanders from its beaten path."

The young assistant attempted an amused smile, but lost no time in producing the canvas. Jethro studied it eagerly, as did his employer. Then with a sigh of relief the assistant murmured:

"I have located the discrepancy, sir."

"I knew you would," smiled Mr. Butterworth. "Now we'll go to the office and I'll listen to the history of the case."

Not a word was exchanged until the two were closeted in the private consulting-room, when Mr. Butterworth began:

"Kaber told you the two houses were originally owned by two brothers, who were partners in a patent-medicine business, with no pains or expense being spared to make the homes twin estates."

"That is correct, sir," said Jethro. "And when the company failed and the two properties were thrown on the market, Lapton and Waller were the purchasers. Bender was a single man with simple tastes, whose work is spoken highly of by critics. The keynote to his disposition was the desire to portray truthfully. In fact, his advance to recognition would have been accelerated had he avoided what some regarded as a too conscientious attention to minor details. He inherited some forty or fifty thousand dollars from his father, and always has lived well within his income. He was very impressionable and was a great admirer of beautiful women. He was continually falling in love, but those who knew him and who understood him viewed this penchant good-naturedly, as being his innocent tribute to beauty.

"There is no doubt but what he was deeply enamored of Mrs. Lapton. It is also true that the two were acquainted in their youth and that Bender for a time was accepted by her as her sweetheart. There is no evidence, however, that they ever met or communicated with each other after their youthful infatuation, until Bender came to visit his old friend Waller and unexpectedly learned that Mrs. Lapton was his neighbor. The prosecution will insist that Bender resumed his love-making, that Lapton knew of his wife's early preference for the artist, that the defendant is a morbidly jealous man, and nursed his hot rage until given an opportunity to remove the cause of his jealousy.

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"The prosecution also believes that his reluctance to speak in his own defense is due to his overwhelming, and perfectly natural, desire to keep his wife's name out of the tragedy. Nor is it expected that she will admit she was in any way the incentive of the homicide unless she is convinced there is no other way to save her husband's life."

"You think the district attorney has a good case?" carelessly inquired Mr. Butterworth.

"I am compelled to answer in the affirmative," sorrowfully replied Jethro. "I shall always regret we did not probe more deeply into the *res gestae* of the case before accepting it. Our only defense can be along the theory of the 'higher law,' and that means dishonor for the woman. I am convinced Lapton will refuse to say a word if that defense is presented, or, if he does speak, it would be to repudiate that theory entirely.

"Take it from any angle and it's rather a lamentable situation for the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation to be placed in, sir. The district attorney, for the first time in his life, is openly pleased that we've been enticed into appearing for the defense. He now considers the Pingle matter as good as offset."

"Just a moment," quietly requested Mr. Butterworth. "What about the point that was annoying you?"

"Really, sir, it is so simple a matter that I am ashamed to have betrayed any concern," regretted Jethro. "The painting cleared it up very nicely. One of the maple trees near the house on one estate has the leaves on the right-hand side more deeply colored than the corresponding tree on the other estate.

"The shrubbery and arrangement of the lawns are practically identical, as we both have observed. The moment I saw the canvas my subconscious memory reminded me that the foliage of the two corresponding trees differed in color tones. That's all, sir."

"It is not all, sir," thundered Mr. Butterworth, rising and pacing the room. "You let things go half-cooked. You have kindly conceded the victory to the prosecution. I now tell you that the canvas proves two things: First, Lapton did not kill Bender; second, Bender was not killed on the Lapton estate!"

III

A WEEK passed with the public press continuing to play up the Lapton story on the first page. That it was not crowded out of this position of importance was largely due to the finding of the alleged mortal weapon in Mrs. Lapton's sitting-room. The fatal bullet fitted the caliber of the revolver, one chamber of which, declared the prosecution's expert, had been recently discharged.

So far as public opinion was concerned, Lapton was already tried and convicted. The newspapers also made much of the fact that the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation had been retained for the defense. From some source, possibly from the district attorney's office, the truth leaked out that the accused had refused to consult with Mr. Butterworth, or in any other way to evince an interest in the case. Mrs. Lapton likewise was obdurate, firmly declining to answer any questions.

So far as Jethro could determine, the seven days of activity had uncovered nothing of benefit to the defense. His long face was unusually overcast as he entered his chief's private office and gloomily announced:

"I have just interviewed Short, Hunnewell & Kaber, as you requested. They have conducted themselves in a most unprofessional manner in this matter. They have tricked us into relieving them of the Lapton defense. I cornered Short, and he was forced to admit that on the day the body of Bender was discovered he received a letter from Lapton asking for an appointment in regard to instituting divorce proceedings against Mrs. Lapton."

"Good!" exclaimed Mr. Butterworth, softly snapping his fingers. "That clears up the first point!"

"I don't see, sir," remonstrated the assistant. "It simply proves the allegation of the prosecution that Lapton was extremely jealous of his wife. It substantiates the alleged motive for the killing."

"Rather, it clears up Lapton's statement to his wife, as overheard by the maid: 'You'll know in the morning.' His manner, or his initial remark on entering the sitting-room, caused her to cry out, you'll remember, 'What have you done?' He replied, 'You'll know in the morning.' That was one of the knots that threatened to spoil our legal saw. Now it is clear that he meant

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she would learn on the morrow that he contemplated divorce. Then followed more conversation, and, according to our theory, he was stung into revealing his intentions instead of waiting till the next day. It was at that point the maid heard her cry, 'How could you? How could you?'"

"That would be a logical defense, so far as it goes," grimly conceded Jethro, "but unfortunately the case is more muddled today than it was when we accepted the retainer. One of the servants has just informed the district attorney that she also overheard the conversation between the Laptons; only she will swear she heard Mrs. Lapton say, 'I will do that which shall end all your suspicions.' She was listening at the keyhole, she confesses, and was reluctant to come forward in the first instance. The other maid was in the next room and heard less perfectly. We might impeach her testimony on the ground that she is a self-confessed eavesdropper."

Mr. Butterworth sprang to his feet and astounded his assistant by rejoicing:

"It fits in beautifully. The case is practically won. Does the district attorney know this information is in our possession?"

"No," replied Jethro, a peculiar smile twisting his thin lips. "I'd rather you wouldn't ask me how I learned it, sir. The district attorney hasn't fed it out to the papers, as he did the finding of the revolver, and probably won't."

"Because it complicates the case and tends to throw suspicions on Mrs. Lapton, eh?" quickly queried Mr. Butterworth.

"Exactly," shortly replied the assistant. "Nor do I see how we can afford to uncover the witness. If it must be one of the Laptons, it had better be the man. I am confident the district attorney will suppress it. If it wasn't for that cursed revolver, found——"

"Pooh, pooh," sniffed Mr. Butterworth. "That is but another obstacle for us to overcome. I shall insist the entire conversation, so far as overheard by the two witnesses, is relevant and illuminating. She asked her husband what he had done; he replied she would find out later. They wrangled, and in a moment of rage he betrayed his purpose of getting a divorce. She upbraids him, 'How could you?' Accusations and denials next are tossed back and forth in a furious undertone.

"Finally the woman announces her intention of ending his suspicions. How? Not by shooting Bender, as her husband now interprets her declaration to have meant, but by going to the relative or friend to whom she wrote that night: 'God help me—help us! It is too horrible to speak of,' meaning Lapton's accusations, 'let alone placing on paper.' Mrs. Lapton has been wronged by her husband's suspicions. She is a proud, high-strung woman. She intended to separate herself from her husband, and never again see the artist whose foolish infatuation had sent the iron into her soul.

"But Lapton, poor devil, not correctly interpreting her words, looks back and recalls them and is convinced she shot Bender. As a result, he will not talk to save himself. She believes him to be guilty of the homicide, and supposing herself to be the innocent cause, will say nothing to implicate him further. There's the case in a nutshell."

"Very pretty," cynically agreed Jethro, "but how will you convice the jury to that effect? What about the revolver?"

"I will convince the jury by revealing the true murderer," promptly replied Mr. Butterworth. "As to the revolver, what about the fatal shot not being heard? That's where the district attorney takes a cropper. I suppose you remember the details of the canvas found beside Bender's body?"

The assistant nodded, his lean jaws relaxing as his gaze warmed with renewed admiration for the old veteran.

"It is keyed up to the outdoor pitch," murmured Mr. Butterworth, fluttering his hand as if the canvas were hanging before him. "It vibrates with life. Observe the truth and delicacy of the color scheme."

"That is so," eagerly broke in Jethro. "The blackberry bushes in the foreground contain every pin-prick of a hole, every touch of frost, every speck of dust, while the lights on the high parts of the leaves are perfect."

"Bravo!" applauded Mr. Butterworth. "Then we agree that Bender in living much with nature always sought to interpret her moods truthfully. We also agree that the canvas taught us that."

"The keynote of his nature was a love of truth," slowly admitted the assistant, now eying his chief intently. "Proceed; I am waiting."

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MR. BUTTERWORTH resumed his old trick of pacing the floor as if parading before the jury-box, and began:

"You were reminded by the picture that the maple trees, similarly situated on the two estates, differ in their color schemes. But you do not seem to grasp the fact that it is the maple on the Waller grounds that has the heavier shading in reds on its right-hand side, as one stands before it to view the house."

"Great Scott!" muttered the assistant, striking his fist against his forehead. "Idiot that I am! Blind fool that I have been! It was a red maple in the painting. Bender's canvas is a picture of the Waller place, not the Lapton house and grounds!"

"True, if we believe he was a lover of truth and exactness," said Mr. Butterworth. "His easel stood northwest of the Waller house, he facing southeast. The leaves on the right of the maple, the side exposed to the northwest, have turned a deeper, richer red than the leaves on the opposite side. He truthfully recorded that fact. Had he placed his canvas before the corresponding maple on the Lapton estate, he would have been looking northwest, with the right of the tree facing southeast, and he would have found the uniformity of coloring which we observed when out there."

"Beautiful!" babbled Jethro, hitching forward to the edge of his chair. "The theory of the prosecution that he was trespassing on the Lapton estate for the purpose, or pretended purpose, of painting the view, falls flat."

"But we haven't finished," quietly continued Mr. Butterworth. "While you were examining the canvas I briefly inspected the palette. I found the madders and lakes soft and ready for the brush. Because of their composition, they will remain in that condition for months. But the white, because of its zinc base, tells a different story. It will dry out after being exposed on the palette, say, a week. I found it very dry. In other words, the canvas was completed at least two weeks before Bender was killed!"

Jethro knit his brows thoughtfully.

"If it wasn't for that gun——"

"If every fact connected with the case were translucent we should not be busying ourselves with its defense," quickly reminded Mr. Butterworth. "We can rest content with charging that the real murderer, some one other than the accused, left the mortal weapon where it was found. The district attorney has a far more difficult barrier to surmount. For, if our theory is correct, he can produce no one who saw the artist on the Lapton grounds the day of the killing, nor can he find any one who heard the fatal shot at some time prior to five o'clock, which was the hour Lapton returned home excited and angry."

The assistant briskly gained his feet and said:

"I feel much better, sir, about the case. What shall I do next?"

Mr. Butterworth penciled a few notes in his memorandum book and then directed:

"Arrange for the coroner to meet us at the district attorney's office at three o'clock this afternoon. Have him bring Mr. Waller with him to identify the canvas formally. I believe you said Bender kept his money at the First National bank. If you want me on anything urgent, call me up there, or at the county clerk's office."

IV

THE distirct attorney was obviously perturbed. Whenever the founder of the Bureau of Abnormal Litigation sought an interview, it was usually a preface to startling and discomforting disclosures. While waiting for the coroner and Mr. Waller to arrive, Mr. Butterworth frankly related what he had learned from the canvas, coupled with his personal observations; and while the public prosecutor received this information with an ironical smile he was secretly worried.

"Why can't you try at least one case without lugging in the bizarre, Butterworth?" he complained, as the old lawyer concluded his recital.

"While the truth may impress you as being bizarre," quietly replied Mr. Butterworth, "the Bureau has found it pays handsomely to present the exact facts for the jury's consideration."

"Bah! This case is as simple as A B C," sneered the district attorney.

"And yet you are almost in doubt at this very moment whether you should try the man or the woman for the crime," smiled Mr. Butterworth. "Having arrested the man, you naturally prefer to go through with him as the defendant."

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"What do you mean?" haughtily demanded the district attorney, his face flushing.

"Only, that should a witness be found who heard Mrs. Lapton incriminating herself, you would be embarrassed by your very wealth of possible defendants," laughed Mr. Butterworth.

The district attorney studied his caller suspiciously, and then slowly returned:

"Whatever Mrs. Lapton may have said, was said after the man was killed."

"After the hour you believe he was killed," mildly corrected Mr. Butterworth. "And, do you know, I'm curious to observe how you'll get around the fact that no one heard the revolver shot?"

"I haven't disclosed all my evidence yet," said the district attorney coldly.

"Of course you know Bender had some forty thousand dollars on deposit at the First National," murmured Mr. Butterworth.

"I have had no occasion to verify that statement as yet."

"And doubtless you are aware the money was deposited jointly to his and another man's account, the survivor to take all," continued the old lawyer.

The district attorney leaned far forward, and in a husky voice demanded:

"What is back of all this, Butterworth? I did not know that fact, but how does it bear on this case?"

"Then, naturally, you could not have known that since Bender's death the survivor has paid off a five-thousand-dollar mortgage on his property, which otherwise would have been foreclosed to-day," added Mr. Butterworth.

"You're trying to throw dust in my eyes," hotly accused the district attorney. "You know you haven't any case as it stands, and you're striving to decoy me from the main track. Mr. Butterworth, it can't be done."

"And you are ignorant of the fact that this man, desperately in need of money, induced his simple friend to open the joint account, explaining that he merely wished to use the same to obtain credit in some extensive dealings in the city. You are ignorant that he finally came to covet the little fortune and cunningly planned his friend's death."

"Absurd!" muttered the district attorney, moistening his dry lips.

"It follows that you are also ignorant of the next move made by the guilty person. At first he hoped to incite the jealousy of a neighbor by convincing his simple-minded dupe that the neighbor's wife—an honorable woman—was infatuated with him. He had learned that the woman and the simple-minded artist at one time had exchanged sentimental vows. He hoped that the husband would in his rage remove the artist. He was successful—be it ever to Lapton's shame—in arousing jealousy. But to his chagrin it did not terminate in a killing—merely threatened to take its way to the divorce court.

"Then it was that his desperation spurred him on to remove his dupe from his path. He killed him and conveyed his body to Lapton's grounds. He placed beside it the canvas, containing what seemed to be a picture of the accused's home. That was his fatal error. After Lapton was arrested, this shallow schemer and murderer sought to clinch his case by introducing the fatal weapon into the Lapton house. If he had not left the painting beside the body, his plans might have caused a second sacrifice of life. But the red in the maple tree will convict him; and you, Mister District Attorney, have got to *lie down!*"

"All rot!" fiercely cried the public prosecutor, half rising from his chair. "Your melodrama will——"

"Pardon, but the coroner wants you on the 'phone," whispered an attendant.

WITH an inarticulate oath the district attorney wheeled about to his desk and picked up the receiver. For a moment he listened blankly, then his eyes rolled toward the complacent Mr. Butterworth, and the high color receded from his face.

"Is it possible?" he huskily murmured.

Then he abruptly replaced the receiver, and, drawing a deep breath, slowly faced his visitor.

"The coroner will not be here this afternoon. He is working on a case," he informed.

"What about Waller?" anxiously asked Mr. Butterworth.

"He will not be here," shortly replied the district attorney. "It is his case the coroner is working on."

"What! Waller dead?"

"Committed suicide an hour ago," said

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the district attorney, now speaking more evenly. "I surrender. You win. I'll have Lapton discharged this afternoon. Waller left a confession in which he admits he killed Bender, the motive being as you deduced. He took the body to the grounds in his automobile. I suppose he suspected his crime had been discovered when he received the coroner's request to come up here."

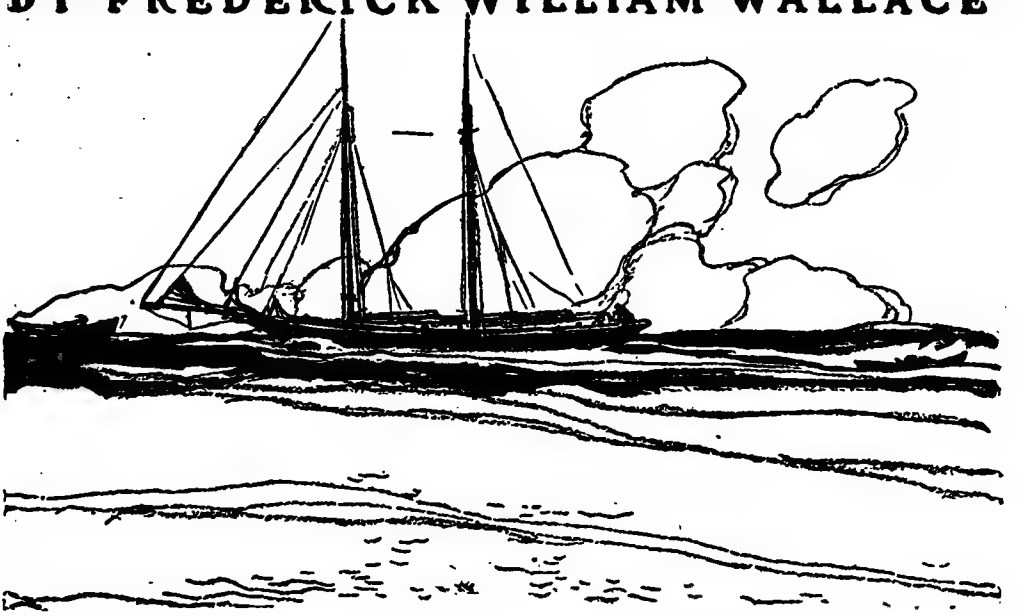
"I suppose so," mused Mr. Butterworth, rising. "Well, it's the first case the Bureau ever won without consulting with its client."

"I congratulate you," awkwardly said the district attorney.

"You need not; rather be thankful that Bender was a truthful artist, even if he was a fool over women!" shortly replied the old lawyer over his shoulder.

THE MAKING GOOD OF SKIPPER WINSLOW

BY FREDERICK WILLIAM WALLACE*



YOUNG Harry Winslow was a determined sort of fellow. When he made up his mind to do a thing he generally did it in spite of opposition and obstacles. He would have made a splendid prosecuting attorney, buccaneer, anarchist, or trust magnate had he been raised in the necessary environment for those exalted positions, but as it was, he entered the fishing business.

*See page 631.

Though Winslow was engaged in piscatorial pursuits, he belonged to the aristocrats of that particular profession. He did not demean himself by hauling herring-nets inside of a tide-water weir, nor in a dory, motor- or sail-boat delude unwary fish to bite on a succulently baited hook within a biscuit-toss of the beach. He was a "blooded banker," as the gurry scars on his wrists testified, and was one of a class of fearless, reckless, big-hearted men who fare forth to

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the shoal-water banks of the Atlantic on able schooners and by trawl, seine and hand-line capture the finny harvest of the sea.

When Winslow finished his education at the Anchorville Grammar School, paternal authority roped him in to engage in agriculture. Like a dutiful son he helped the "old man" out in the farm work and acquired hard muscles and toughened sinews.

He might have been a farmer for all time, but the vistas of the white-sailed schooners passing down the bay in front of the homestead aroused strange desires in young Winslow's breast.

"An' what do ye intend to do, son?" inquired the curious parent.

"I'm goin' fishin'," confessed Harry with determination.

"Goin' to be drowned!" grunted his father, and knowing his offspring's nature, he added: "Well, boy, go! I hope ye'll get such a dose of it on yer first trip that ye'll hate th' sight o' a fishin' vessel fur th' rest o' yer nateral life!"

At the tender age of seventeen and with this blessing, young Winslow hove his dunnage aboard the ninety-ton fishing-schooner *Clara Willis* and went fishing.

When his twentieth birthday had scarce passed he made up his mind afresh and confided his future intentions to Jimmy Thomas, his dory-mate.

They were out in the dory, and when Winslow unburdened his mind, old Thomas bit off a chew and laughed until his oilskin coat threatened to burst at the seams.

"Ho, ho! boy, ye've great notions! Goin' as skipper on yer next trip are ye? Waal, Cap'en Harry Winslow, here's wishin' ye full decks an' high-liner's fares! Goin' skipper—Ha, ha!"

And Thomas chuckled immoderately, while Winslow, standing up to his full six feet, glared at his dory-mate with a savage stare.

"What th' —— are ye laughin' at, you ol' runt?" he growled. "D'ye think I ain't able t' tackle th' job?"

The other, still smiling, shook his head.

"No, no, Harry, I wouldn't say that, fur ye hev gall enough fur anything; but ye're young, boy, ye're young. I'm thinkin' that any man as'll trust ye with a vessel will be takin' a big chanst, an' ef ye kin git a crew ter go with ye, ye're a livin' wonder. Aye! a livin' wonder."

The old fisherman busied himself in coiling down the last tub of trawl, and after hitching the tub becket he looked over at the sullen, handsome face of his young dory-mate.

"Boy!" he said quietly. "What has put that idea inter yer head? Ye kin surely tell me, yer ol' dory-mate, an' th' man that has fathered ye on th' banks sence ye came aboard th' *Willis* three year ago. I'm an ol' man, Harry, but I kin see further through a pawl-post than ye think, an' when I hear a young shaver like you talkin' about goin' skipper, then I know there's more on th' trawl than comes up on th' first tub o' gear. What is it? A girl, maybe?"

Winslow turned red under his tan and nervously twirled the nippers around his hands.

"Maybe it is, Jimmy—an' maybe I'm wishin' t' quit th' slavery o' this dory work an' git on."

Thomas gave a comprehending nod.

"I knew thar' was a woman at th' bottom of it," he said. "They do more to spur a man on than ambition alone. Who is th' girl, Harry? Nancy Crawford?"

"It ain't Nancy Crawford, Jimmy—ye kin gamble on that." For a moment he paused, then looking straight into the eyes of the old fisherman, spoke: "Jimmy, I want your help. You've done a mighty lot for me sence I come a-fishin', an' I want you to stand by me now. Ef I take a vessel out, will ye come with me?"

"What vessel are ye goin' t' git?" inquired Thomas, apparently ignoring the request.

"I cal'late gittin' th' *Valfreya*——"

"Th' *Valfreya!*" ejaculated the other in surprise. "Why she's an old wracked tub an' near thutty year old. Leaks like a basket an' is about as tender in th' hull as a cardboard box! Shucks! ye're surely losin' yer senses t' think o' skipperin' that ol' shack drogher. Why, thar' ain't a man in Anchorville as'll take her!"

"That don't matter," said Winslow decisively. "*I'm* goin' to take her, old an' all as she is. She may leak a bit, but she kin sail ef properly handled, an' she'll get fish if luck's with me."

"An' ye cal'late goin' *Winter* fishin' in her?"

"Aye, I'm goin' Winter fishin' in her!"

Thomas drummed his fingers on the

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thwart for a minute and after a glance at the schooner jogging a mile or so to loo'ard, spoke.

"Who is th' girl, Harry?"

"What th' dickens d'ye want t' know for?" growled Winslow, endeavoring to appear unconcerned under his dory-mate's quizzical gaze.

"Waal," replied the other, "you tell me who she is, an' I'll tell ye ef I kin help ye out."

Winslow kicked a mottled cusk into the pen:

"What would ye say to Isabel Dickey?"

The old fisherman whistled.

"Isabel Dickey!" he cried. "One o' th' prettiest girls in Anchorville! Why, Harry, her old man, Clarence Dickey, owns the old tub you're thinkin' o' takin' out, an' ef I'm not mistook, Captain Fred Hanson is sparkin' her."

"Aye, so he is," replied the other. "An' that's th' reason why I'm makin' a bid for skipper. Hanson has bin goin' pretty strong around there, but I asked her at Murphy's dance six weeks ago ef she'd marry me——"

"And?" Thomas was all attention.

"She said I'd have to make good first. She wasn't goin' to tie up with a common fisherman, an' says to me, 'Git a vessel an' show what ye kin do, an' maybe I'll consent!' Her father thinks a powerful lot o' Fred Hanson an' wants her to marry him. Hanson has made good money an' owns a large share in his own vessel, and o' course looks a likely feller to Clarence Dickey.

"That's how th' land lays, Jimmy, an' ye kin understand why I am so anxious to git out fur myself even in an ol' tub like th' *Valfreya*. Dickey said I c'd have her, an' ef I kin git you ter come along with me an' make up a gang, I'll give Fred Hanson a run for his money, green an' all as I am!"

Thomas snapped the thole-pins into the dory's gunnel and thrust his great fist out:

"I'm with you, boy," he cried. "Shake on it! Fred Hanson, is it? Waal, you git yer vessel an' I'll scratch up a gang!"

CLARENCE DICKEY, his rotund body crammed into an armchair, swung around from his desk and regarded Winslow with a questioning stare.

"D'ye really mean t' take th' *Valfreya* out this Winter?"

"Why, certainly I mean it," replied Winslow decisively. "I never say anything I don't mean."

The vessel owner glanced over the determined set of Winslow's face and the lithe, strapping bulk of the young fisherman with eyes of approval. After a moment he spoke:

"She's kinder old, Harry, an' leaks a bit, maybe——"

"Nawthin' but what a little pumpin' will keep free."

"And her riggin' wants a trifle of overhaulin'."

"I'll overhaul it."

"Her sails are good. I got a new mains'l last Summer for her an' she ain't paid for it yet."

"She'll pay for it soon."

Dickey laughed.

"By Godfrey, Harry, but ye've great confidence in yerself—ye sure have! There's a heap o' difference atween you an' Bill McCall, who took th' *Valfreya* out last. Poor Bill was scared a'most to death in her an' brought back a fare of only twenty thousand for a seventeen-day trip." Old Dickey laughed again at the recollection and said finally: "All right, Harry, you go ahead an' take her. Get whatever gear ye want at th' store an' chalk it up against your trip. Not too much, mind! Ef ye don't make good, I don't wanter be stuck for a large amount. Bring me in your fare an' I'll take it off yer hands, and as fish prices are goin' to run high, here's wishin' you luck!"

NEWS travels fast in a fishing town and gossip had already been busy. Fishermen at the street corners, in the poolrooms and at the boarding-houses discussed Harry Winslow and the *Valfreya* with the critical freedom of the fraternity. "He's too young!" was the general verdict, and old mossbunkers shook their heads and predicted dire catastrophes.

"He'll slam her ashore somewheres," they said, "and who's agoin' ter risk his life an' share by shippin' in that ol' tub with a green skipper like Harry Winslow?"

Jimmy Thomas moved around the various groups trying to pick up a six-dory crowd, but it was hard work. Winslow was well known and well liked by the Anchorville fishermen, but his age and inexperience went against him, and men did not like to

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give up good paying berths on well-found vessels and with old "high-liner" skippers for a venture with a green master on an old leaky schooner.

Thomas informed Winslow how the land lay, and the young fisherman's face set in hard lines.

"Jimmy," he said with a steely glitter in his eyes, "I know I'm goin' to hev a job to persuade them trawl-haulers ter ship with me, but get a crew I shall, even ef I hev ter shanghai these bacalhao birds from th' flakes yonder!" And he strode away to superintend the rigging of the old *Valfreya.*

II

THE Anchorville Town Ball or "Hop" came off a few days before the Winter fleet set out, and pretty Isabel Dickey held the floor as the "Belle." Captain Fred Hanson—a swarthy, well-built fellow on the right side of thirty, resplendent in a brand-new suit and a flaring yellow tie—led the girl off for the first dance.

The farmers' sons and fishermen present, horny-handed sons of toil who felt their awkwardness in starched shirts, collars and creaking shoes, watched the pair in admiration; passed hoarse-whispered comments among themselves, and envied Hanson his good fortune in gaining the favor of the fascinating Isabel Dickey.

Harry Winslow, looking like a young Greek god in his blue serge "shore clothes," came in late, and spied Isabel and Hanson engaged in a pleasant tête-à-tête over in a corner. Hanson and Winslow were rivals and neither held any love for the other, but the younger man screwed up his nerve and strode across the hall.

"Good evening, Isabel," he said, and the girl turned from Hanson with a winning smile. "Hullo, Harry! Where have you been all the time?" She greeted him with evident cordiality, while her companion sat silent with a sour smile on his dark face.

"Come and sit down here," she commanded with an impatient gesture. "I've been looking for you all evening."

Winslow took the vacant chair by her side, and Isabel resumed the conversation:

"What's this I hear about you, Harry? Father tells me that you are going to take one of his vessels out as captain."

"Yes, that's so," replied Winslow. "I'm goin' to try my luck."

Hanson gave vent to a supercilious sniff which caused the younger man to glance across at him.

"How is it that you haven't been around to see me since you came in this time? Are you so busy with your new command?"

Winslow laughed:

"Well, yes, Isabel, I hev bin rather busy. She's not what ye'd call a new vessel, y' know, an' 'tis hard work gettin' a crew t' ship with a green skipper like me."

Miss Dickey nodded comprehendingly, and Hanson, thinking it was about time the conversation ended, gave a grunt and said:

"I cal'late ye'll be thirsty, Miss Dickey? Let me take ye inside."

The girl looked up at the swart-visaged Hanson.

"Go ahead, Captain," she replied. "I'm not a bit thirsty, but you can trot along, as I want to have a chat with Harry for a few minutes. I'll see you later for that other dance."

Cursing Winslow under his breath, he ambled off to the refreshment-room and proceeded to fill up on a stronger brew than lemonade or ginger beer.

The familiar look of determination came into Winslow's eyes when he had gone, and turning to Isabel, he said:

"Well, Isabel, I've made a bid for skipper now, an' I'm goin' t' try an' see what I kin do. Do you remember what you said?"

Miss Dickey regarded the toe of her shoe with a preoccupied air and avoided the young fisherman's gaze.

"Oh," she replied diffidently. "I say a lot of things I don't mean."

Winslow was disconcerted and his face betrayed his feelings.

"Why?" he asked tensely. "Didn't you mean what you told me at Murphy's six weeks back?"

The girl, with a slowly reddening face, still regarded the shoe intently.

"Oh, bother!" she said with studied carelessness. "You didn't take any notice of that, I hope. Why, Captain Hanson— Of course I didn't mean it. Why should I?"

"Why should you?" repeated Winslow, nonplussed and visibly disturbed by the mention of his rival's name. "I—I—don't know—but—but you were serious when you said that you'd marry me ef I got a vessel an' made good?"

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Miss Dickey was young and knew she was pretty. Many men had idolized her and her head was slightly turned. Winslow was such an insistent kind of lover, and it went against her nature to capitulate to him too easily—she wanted to play him a while longer. Nervously kicking at the rung of a chair with her foot, she replied with a slight tremor in her voice:

"Oh, I did not know what I was saying, Harry. I—I was only fooling. I—I—oh, let's talk of something else."

Winslow had heard enough. With a sinking heart, he squared his shoulders and rose to his feet. Regarding the girl with a set face, he murmured a harsh "Good-by!" and walked away.

FOR a full minute Miss Dickey sat communing with unpleasant thoughts, and she had an impulse to run and call him back. She liked the handsome young fisherman; liked his manly ways and his determined manner of doing things. Why had she equivocated with him when she knew that his was not the nature to be the shuttlecock of a coquette's whims? Men of the Winslow type always took everything so seriously, and, as far as their dealings with the fair sex are concerned, were so quick to take offense.

Blaming him for his hastiness and herself for her foolishness in quibbling with the only man she ever cared for, Miss Dickey was in no enviable frame of mind when Captain Hanson returned.

"Hah!" he said, and his breath was odorous of rum. "Ours is the next dance, I cal'late?"

With a meaning sniff, she gazed coldly into the leering Hanson's flushed face.

"You'll have to cancel that date," she replied frigidly, "for I'm going home."

"Goin' home already?" growled Hanson in surprise. "What's th' matter, Isabel?"

"Nothing is the matter," she answered tartly, "and don't call me Isabel—I'm Miss Dickey to you, please!"

Leaving the astonished Hanson to gaze after her in open-mouthed amazement, she swept over to the ladies' cloak-room.

"Waal, I'll be ——!" growled the skipper. "This is some o' that shaver Winslow's work, I guess. He's bin tellin' her somethin' an' she's sore on me. I'll fix th' swab!" Cursing under his breath, he elbowed back into the refreshment-room again and joined the number of farmers and fishermen who preferred liquid enjoyment to that of dancing. As he got outside of a few hard drinks he lost his discretion and began to talk. "Boys," he rasped thickly, "I hear that young Winslow is skipperin' th' ol' *Valfreya* this trip. Ain't th' cuss got a gall?"

A brawny fisherman, red-faced and perspiring, bit off a chew and spoke.

"Why, Cap'n Hanson, what's th' matter with th' lad takin' a vessel out? I cal'late he'll be able ter sail an' find fish as good as anybody I knows on."

"Aw, that be hanged!" growled the skipper. "Who's goin' ter be fool enough ter ship with that young cub? Cripes! I wouldn't sling a dory over th' side ef I was sailin' with him for fear he'd lose me. Let him make a set in a fog or a blow an' I'll bet he'll hev th' hull gang astray. Ef he don't do that, he'll be to anchor in harbor most times awaitin' till th' weather clears, an' a fine fare ye'd make with a skipper like that!"

Jimmy Thomas happened to be among the crowd when Hanson was holding forth, and pushing his way to the front, fetched up alongside the vindictive skipper.

"Hah! Cap'n Hanson," he cried. "You are talkin' mighty loud. How d'ye know that Harry Winslow won't make a good skipper? What do ye know about his ability ter handle a vessel or catch fish? You don't know anything about him, but I know a thunderin' lot about you. Who was th' feller, Cap'n Hanson, when you an' me were dory-mates in th' ol' *Effie Cranberry* as used ter complain o' a weak heart every time we had a long haul or pull agin wind an' tide? Who was th' skipper that ran fur Shelburne an' left Charlie Watson an' Archie McKenzie on Roseway?

"Ye heard what they said about you arter we picked them up two days astray on th' bank? What did they call ye, Cap'n Hanson? A white-livered swine, I think it was! That's a nice thing for a man to say, but there's lots more I c'd say about ye! Dirty tricks like cuttin' yer gear long afore th' queer thing went to th' masthead, an' even now they say ye'll sit astride o' th' wheel-box while th' gang is busy baitin' up an' make them knock off ter give a pull on th' mainsheet or jig up.

"An' ye talk about Harry Winslow? My dory-mate he's bin fur three years, an' a

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finer lad never hauled a trawl. Ask any o' his shipmates about him. Cheerful, willing an' always ready ter help a man out with his gear—aye, an' many's th' time he's wanted ter do all th' pullin' an' haulin' an' baitin' in order ter give me, his ol' dory-mate, a longer spell. Now, you try ter queer him in gittin' a gang because he's got a chanst ter make good? —— me, Fred Hanson, ye show a dirty spirit, an' ef ye'll pull off that blasted yaller tie an' biled shirt I'll fight ye fur th' pick o' yer gang!"

A red-faced fisherman slapped Jimmy on the back with a bellow of delight, and a loud roar of approval arose from the assembled company. Captain Hanson stood staring at the old fellow with a face that burned dark with suppressed rage. Hanson knew Jimmy Thomas of old. He knew that Thomas's fifty years sat but lightly on his shoulders, and that the man was as rough and as tough as a lignum-vitæ dead-eye.

"Waal," growled the old man, "are ye goin' ter scrap, ye big stiff? Are ye goin' ter take off yer coat ter me?"

While Jimmy was proceeding to divest himself of that article of hindrance to a free swing of fists, the door opened and a strident female voice exclaimed:

"Is James Thomas inside there? I'll swan he is, th' lazy, swillin'—— Ah, there ye are! Haow much longer d'ye think me'n Sophie are goin' ter wait on you? Come you here at onct an' take us home!"

Poor Jimmy's bellicose attitude vanished, and giving an appealing glance around the stolid-faced fishermen, he growled a deep oath and made for the door.

"All right, Maria, m'dear," he said. "I was only speakin' ter Cap'n Hanson."

AFTER he had gone, Hanson gave a sniff.

"Th' cursed ol' scum!" he growled. "What with him an' Winslow there'll be no holdin' o' them in that ol' tub they're fishin' in."

The red-faced man gave a sarcastic laugh.

"Ah, ye make me tired, Skipper Hanson! I'll bet that Winslow, young an' all as he is, will show you how ter sail an' fish afore he's through!"

"Th' —— he will!" bellowed Hanson in his rage. "Let him try it! I'll put up th' money, an' you kin tell him so from me. I'll break him—I'll ruin him! Sailin' or fishin' or both! I got th' vessel ter sail an' I got th' dough ter put up. Show me, indeed!"

And Hanson poured himself out a stiff four-finger nip of neat rum and tossed it off.

"Say," he cried to the fisherman who was posing as the Winslow champion, "you tell yer fr'en Winslow that I'll put up two hundred—aye, three hundred—dollars that I'll beat him out on his first trip sailin' an' fishin' ef he'll do th' same."

"How'll ye arrange that?" inquired a dozen voices.

"Easy 'nough," answered Hanson. "We'll start out from here together an' I'll meet him off th' Cape or back o' th' Seal Islands in ten or eleven days arter we start an' give him th' run for home."

"Aye," growled a man, "that's all very well, but Winslow's vessel'll only carry 'bout eighty thousand pounds o' fish while yours'll load around a hundred an' twenty, an' you've got a bigger gang an' more dories."

"That don't matter. Winslow'll never git eighty thousand in ten weeks, far less ten days. Ef he gits fifty thousand with a six-dory gang an' beats me home from th' Seal Island, he kin lift th' stakes!"

The Winslow champion looked around the room:

"Did ye hear that, fellers? Hanson says he'll bet two or three hundred dollars that he'll lick Winslow sailin' an' fishin', an' ef th' youngster gits fifty thousand o' fish an' beats him on th' run from the Island he lifts th' money. Ain't that what you said, Cap'n Hanson?"

"Aye, that's what I said," growled Hanson.

"All right, Skipper. I'll see Harry Winslow in th' mornin', an' ef he can't afford ter put up th' money I know plenty that will. Besides that, me an' Wallace Burke'll ship on th' *Valfreya* ter help th' lad out!"

III

WINSLOW spent a sleepless night. He felt that the bottom had been knocked out of all his plans for the future, and that he had been the victim of a raw deal at his sweetheart's hands. Under the impression that his rival, Hanson, was the lucky man, he writhed in spirit, and analyzed her words from every point of

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view. In spite of the blow he had received, his determination to take the *Valfreya* out was not weakened. He had still a little to gain if he made good, but it was not the same. The retrospect left him in no cheerful frame of mind when Jack Henderson called on him.

"Have ye made up yer crowd yet, Harry?" was Henderson's first question.

"No," replied Winslow. "I've got th' cook, Jimmy Thomas an' Bill Jackson, Andy Watson and my cousin John Winslow, an' th' promise o' six more fellers—enough for a five-dory gang, I cal'late. I'll make that do for this trip."

"No you won't, lad," said Henderson, "for me'n Wally Burke'll go with ye an' make up yer six dories."

Winslow smiled his pleasure:

"That's pretty decent o' you fellers t' help me out that way, an' you an' Burke are two o' th' best men outer Anchorville. I only hope we'll strike fish."

"Aye, but that ain't what I want ter see ye about, Harry. Last night, Fred Hanson was talkin' pretty loud up to th' dance, an' shootin' off as how he c'd lick ye fishin' or sailin'——"

Winslow's brows contracted and his face took on the old hard look as Henderson continued.

"I stuck up fer ye, an' arter he an' ol' Jimmy had some words, Hanson says that he'd put up two or three hundred dollars agin yer vessel fer th' trip. He said that ye both c'd leave together an' make a ten or twelve day trip of it, meetin' him aroun' th' Seal Island on a certain date an' hev a hook fer home. He said that ef you hed fifty thousand o' fish in yer hold an' beat him sailin' that ye c'd lift th' money."

The young skipper thought hard over his chances.

"I'm green," he muttered to himself. "Hanson's an old hand. I've a poor wracked vessel, an' he has a new semi-knockabout, well ballasted an' well rigged. Th' chances are all in his favor. Ef I lose, I'm done for. It'll leave me broke, an' 'tis packin' me kit for a Gloucester vessel that I'll have ter be ef he licks me. He's doin' this, I cal'late, so's he kin make a bigger fool o' me to Isabel Dickey. He'll be sayin' ter her, 'Poor Winslow, he takes a vessel out an' kin neither sail nor catch fish. I took a bet o' two hundred dollars off'n him as easy as candy from a kid!'"

Reaching into his inside pocket, he produced his bank-book and studied it. "Three hundred an' fifty left," he murmured. "I'd better take him up on th' two hundred, I guess—No! two hundred be hanged, I'll go th' whole hog an' make it three!" Turning to the expectant Henderson, he said slowly, "Jack, you tell Hanson that I'll take him up on three hundred. Tell him I'm goin' out on Saturday—that'll be th' twentieth, an' I'll meet him aroun' th' Seal Island on th' thirtieth day o' the month. Ef he can't sail on Saturday, I'll wait for him, an' I'll git th' money an' hand it over to Bill Watson th' sailmaker, an' he kin do th' same."

After Henderson had gone, he strolled down to his vessel, upon which the rigger and Jimmy Thomas were busy.

"Mornin', Harry," cried the old fisherman as Winslow jumped aboard. "We'll git them topmasts down this forenoon, I reckon?"

"No!" said Winslow decisively. "I'll carry my topmasts this trip. I've taken up Hanson's bet, an' I need all th' sail I kin carry."

Thomas scratched his head.

"Waal, it ain't goin' ter do her anny good drivin' her. She's old an' tender in th' hull, an' I cal'late ef ye start carryin' sail she'll fall apart in th' weather we git this time o' year. Ye've taken up Hanson's bet, ye say? Boy, I think ye're a fool!"

"I may be, Jimmy," replied the other slowly, "but I ain't goin' ter have that feller shootin' off his mouth about me. I'll give him a run for th' money, an' th' boys are standin' by me. Jack Henderson an' Wally Burke are comin'."

"An' I've got th' other fellers," interrupted Thomas, "so we hev our six-dory crowd."

DURING the ensuing days the young skipper was busy, and even though his mind was disturbed with the odds he was fighting against, he tried to forget them with the solace of hard work. The *Valfreya's* rigging was overhauled and set up; the running rigging rove afresh; and after slushing the masts the sails were bent. A lick of paint here and there gave the old schooner some appearance of her former glory, and by Saturday the gang were aboard, ice and bait in the hold, and six double-trawl dories fitted and nested on her decks. With the early morning tide

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sail was hoisted, and the *Valfreya* nosed around the end of the wharf at which she had sojourned so long and followed Hanson's smart semi-knockabout *Minnehaha* down the bay.

Although it was scarce daylight, a large crowd of fishermen and interested spectators gathered on the wharf to view the start of the rivals, and the cheers were all in Winslow's favor.

"Give th' big stiff ——, Harry!" men bawled in the juicy language of the sea, and with a last valediction of "Good luck, lad, an' a full fare!" the old schooner poked her sharp toothpick bow into the Fundy combers, while Winslow twirled the wheel and watched Hanson's vessel sailing off ahead.

The big *Minnehaha* was in Winter rig, without topmasts, and under her four lowers spanked along to the light easterly breeze. The *Valfreya* was also under her lower sails, but as she carried her topmasts, she could set a balloon jib, foretopsail, maintopmast-staysail, and maintopsail in a light wind.

In Fall and Winter fishing there is not much chance, however, of setting the light sails, and Hanson, noticing that Winslow carried his topmasts, laughed derisively at his rival.

"Huh! Winslow thinks by carryin' his topm'sts he's goin' ter fly his kites when we hook for home. Th' chances are his ol' hooker'll flip her sticks over th' side in th' first squall that hits him."

And the swarthy skipper spat contemptuously over the rail.

While the *Valfreya* was standing out to sea, a very repentant Isabel Dickey shivered and watched her from her bedroom window.

"Oh, why did I treat him so?" she reproached herself. "He's doing it all for me—risking his life in that old vessel and Winter coming on—Winter coming on, with the snow and the gales which make fishermen's wives widows and their children fatherless! Oh, but I've been heartless, and him so brave and fearless. May God help him and watch over him while he's on the waters!"

And the pretty and imperious Isabel, after gazing with aching heart and hungry eyes until the *Valfreya* disappeared from sight, threw herself on her bed and cried.

IV

LEWINSLOW made his first berth some twenty-five miles to the southward of Cape Sable, after crawling down the bay through intermittent palls of steaming mist. A heavy swell was running when the young skipper passed the word to "Bait up!" and the old schooner rolled and staggered over the long chop with her jumbo tail-rope belayed to windward—jogging.

Baiting up their trawls by the light of flaring, smoking kerosene torches, the men, lined up around the bait-boards on the kid and cabin-trunk, shouted boisterous chaff and speculated upon their chances with Hanson and the *Minnehaha*. Winslow stood by the wheel, nervously fingering the spokes, and with his thoughts back in Anchorville.

"Waal, Harry boy," cried Jimmy Thomas, "we're makin' our first set this mornin', so here's wishin' you beginner's luck—full decks!"

The dories were swung out and the set made, but in spite of good wishes, the best part of the baiting fed the dogfish, and the men cursed heartily when they came aboard."

"I niver saw sich a run o' th' dog-goned pests," growled Jack Henderson. "Sure, me han's are sore wid slattin' them off. I hope ye ain't a Jonah, Harry?"

Winslow laughed.

"Never mind, fellers—better luck next set!" And though he tried to assume an appearance of ease, his heart fell when he glanced into the pens. "Only a thousand pounds!" he muttered. "That ain't bright for a start, with fifty thousand ter git in eight days."

While the men were baiting up again for the afternoon set, he swung the schooner a few miles to the eastward, and another set was made with scarcely better results, and the fare for the first day amounted to a scant four thousand pounds of mixed fish.

During the night he hauled her another ten miles east, and next morning in a rising wind and sea dropped the dories. There was a Wintry spite in the wind, and the men as they toiled in the boats murmured a hope that Winslow would be able to handle the schooner and pick them up if it came away squally. The weather changed as they feared. A vicious burst of wind struck the *Valfreya* while she was jogging to lee-

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ward, and while Winslow, alone upon her decks, struggled at the wheel, the peak halyard of the big mainsail parted and the gaff started to whip the air.

Yelling for the cook, the young skipper jammed the wheel over and, with a glance at the dories lifting and sinking over the green hills of foam-laced sea, slipped it into the becket and jumped forward. The cook, in apron and with floury hands, helped to get the head-sails down, and racing aft again, both men swayed with herculean exertions upon the main-sheet and brought the boom aboard.

"Lower away on the throat!" cried Winslow, and both tallied on to the halyard and lowered the thundering, flapping canvas.

With an eye on the weather and the dories, the skipper worked with feverish energy, reeving the halyard afresh, and as the minutes passed the squall increased in strength, and rain and flying spume swirled over the waters. Winslow quickly completed the job.

"Come on, Cook!" he bawled. "We'll hev ter git th' mains'l on her an' pick th' gang up. It's blowin' stiffer——"

"How in hades are ye goin' t' git that brute of a sail up?" cried the other. "We'll niver manage it ourselves."

"Git th' halyards to th' winch thar'. We'll git it up. Hustle now, fer God's sake!"

Winslow does not know how they managed to get the mainsail set, but a few minutes of almost superhuman effort on the part of the cook and himself saw the big sail up, the halyards belayed, and, with the cook swaying on the jib halyards, and himself to the wheel, the *Valfreya* swung off through the smother with the seas slapping over the rail and sluicing the decks.

Dory after dory pulled through the slashing wind and rain, and hastily pitching their catch into the pens, the men swung them aboard. Jimmy Thomas's dory was the last, and after nesting her, he came aft.

"You're all right, boy!" he cried. "—— me! Any man that says you can't handle a vessel an' pick up th' gang has got ter hev a personal interview with me! Me an' Bill saw yer mains'l go by the run, an' we thought fer sure ye'd lose us, an' I couldn't blame ye ef ye had. It was smart work—darned smart work!"

And the men voiced the old fisherman's sentiments.

The catch was a small one again—some three thousand pounds, but Winslow felt strangely happy. He had proved his ability to handle the vessel in an accident and a blow, and knew that from now on he enjoyed the confidence of his crew.

With a falling barometer, the wind increased to a gale, and Winslow kept the men aboard after getting the vessel hove-to under jumbo and foresail. All through the long afternoon and night he paced the quarter watching the weather and thinking. Men hailed him from cabin and forecastle, trying to lure him below to the delights of checkers and High-Low-Jack, but Winslow refused with a laugh. How could he sit playing cards while his brain was in a torment with thoughts of Isabel, Hanson, the wager, and his future?

A rich bass voice was singing "Yankee Harbor," and he paused and listened to the words:

> "An' when I come home from sea again,
> Then I shall happy be,
> For I will see my own true love,
> Sit a-smiling on my knee——"

Winslow resumed his pacing again with a bitter smile.

"They can sing, th' happy dogs, even in an' ol' leaky tub hove-to, but they've nothing to worry them."

THE young fisherman was beginning to understand the cark and care of responsibility, and the ever-recurring memory of his talk with Isabel Dickey did little to nerve him for the strife. If he lost his bet, his life would be made a misery to him. Fishermen aboard the vessels, and in the pool- and bar-rooms ashore would make his failure a topic of conversation for months, and though they would mean no harm, yet a careless laugh or thoughtless remark from them would cut him to the soul.

Then Hanson and Isabel Dickey—Pah! he had made a fool of himself! What did she care for him when Hanson—the big, loud-talking fishing-skipper, successful, with a vessel of his own, and plenty of money—was laying his heart at her feet? Winslow squared his shoulders, stamped heavily, and with the old determined look in his eyes vowed that nothing would stop him in the course he had laid out for himself.

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"I'm in this game to win — to make good, an' win an' make good I shall in spite o' weather, dogfish, Hanson an' Isabel Dickey!"

From the forecastle came a rollicking ditty, and he listened again:

"'Twas th' first o' March, bullies, when we did set sail,
An' th' wind from th' north'ard was blowin' a gale.
Into Brier Islan' our vessel did steer,
An' hung to her hook till th' weather did clear!

"Our Skipper, he'd croak ef we got a fair wind,
An' be stumpin' th' quarter an' whistlin' a hymn.
He'd always be anchored afore it was dark,
Till we looked like a light-ship stuck up for a mark!

"Ef when in port we should wanter land,
We'd hev ter crawl aft with our hats in our hand,
We'd hev ter kow-tow to th' surly ol' bear,
As he lallyed aroun' in his ol' armchair!

"We made a poor fare, but we're livin' in hopes,
That in Gloucester port we will coil up our ropes,
May —— take th' skippers that can not get fish,
An' th' Lord send us shackers, th' kind that we wish!"

"Hey, Harry Winslow," cried old Thomas. "Come below here. We've got a bloomin' operay goin' full swing."

And the young skipper forgot his cares for the nonce and joined the happy, shouting gang in the forecastle.

WITH the cold glint of the November morning the wind died down, and though a very heavy sea was running, Winslow turned the gang out to bait up and make a set. Wreathed in spasmodic shrouds of fog, the men hauled their trawls in the reeling dories, and Winslow kept the schooner jogging up and down the line.

Dogfish still ran strong, and almost every second hook saw the wriggling pests coming up to the roller, while the vicious slats as the men knocked them off sounded like a continuous rattle of musketry-fire. The catch for the third day amounted to four thousand pounds of mixed fish.

During the night the wind came away in vicious squalls, and Winslow saw that to make a set in the morning would be risking the lives of his men, so he kept them aboard and made another ratch to the eastward, bringing up in forty-five fathoms on the southern edge of Roseway Bank.

A late afternoon set was made in a heavy sea, and when the dories came alongside in the darkness of the Fall evening some six thousand pounds were pitched into the pens.

"Gettin' a trifle better," cried the skipper. "That makes seventeen thousand altogether for four days' work. We hev only four more days t' git our fifty thousand, an' thirty-three thousand in four days means that you fellers has got ter do some tall hustlin'!" After dressing down and baiting up trawls again, Winslow called out, "Go below, boys, an' git some sleep. You'll turn out at three in th' mornin', fer I'm goin' ter make three sets to-morrow!"

And they did. Hanging on to the forty-five fathom ground on Roseway, Winslow had the men out hauling trawls by torchlight, and when at eight in the evening the men crawled wearily aboard, they had to turn to and dress down a full deck of twenty-four thousand pounds of fish. Tired though they were, they worked with a will, and singing, smoking and chaffing, they packed the last cleaned fish in the hold at midnight, and proceeded to bait up trawls for the morrow.

Winslow, gaunt, hollow-eyed and unshaven, gave a helping hand, and cheered the tired men with his enthusiasm.

"Three sets again to-morrow, boys!" he cried with a laugh at their glum faces. "Go below now an' git whatever sleep ye kin. I'll make the ol' cook stand th' lookout till three, an' I'll take th' wheel myself."

Five days gone and with forty-one thousand pounds below, Winslow felt like a new man again. "Three days more," he muttered, "an' only another ten thousand ter beat Hanson! Waal, I reckon I kin keep awake for that."

THREE sets were made on the sixth day, and when the dories were nested for the night the men cursed as with weary bodies and aching heads they commenced dressing down a record catch of twenty-seven thousand pounds! After every set the dories came alongside with gunnels almost awash with the weight of fish, and fishermen swore that Winslow was a lucky skipper.

"Blast me!" cried Thomas. "It sure beats all my fishin'. Me arms are nearly pulled outer j'int with haulin' trawls with a strike on ivery hook an' nary a dogfish, perch or skate. I cal'late Hanson loses his bet as far as th' fishin' goes. How much have we got now, Harry?"

"Sixty-eight thousand, I reckon," replied

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the skipper. "But I want more than that."

As it was nearly three in the morning before the catch was dressed down and the trawls rebaited, Winslow allowed the men to sleep in till noon. A set was made in the afternoon in a dense fog, and Winslow further proved his ability by picking all the men up without difficulty.

"He's a wonder, that kid!" remarked Wally Burke. "I believe he hed a photograph of all th' dories an' their bearin's in his mind's eye when he started in pickin' us up. I was hangin' on ter me trawl anchor an' Henderson was blowin' th' shell like Sam Hill when this ol' toothpick snuggles outer th' muck alongside of us, an' I niver had ter pull an oar, he was that close. He's a rare bird, is this younker of our'n, an' he's goin' ter give that blowhard Fred Hanson some jolt!"

The catch for the seventh day was eight thousand pounds of mixed fish, mostly cod, haddock and hake, and the total catch amounted to seventy-six thousand, and a high fare for a vessel like the *Valfreya*.

Next day opened dull and stormy looking, and when Winslow crept up on deck from a fitful sleep on the cabin lockers, he saw that some bad weather was due. Picking his way for'ard, he sung out down the foc'sle hatch,

"Bait up for a one-tub set, fellers! It's goin' ter blow, but I reckon ye kin make a set with one tub afore it starts."

Pulling on their oilskins and boots, the men turned out and went over the side with a single tub of trawl. They had barely shot the gear before a basket went up to the masthead of the schooner, and she commenced picking up the dories. Leaving their trawls and buoys in the water, the fishermen answered the urgent call of the "queer thing" and, pulling for the vessel, got aboard not a moment too soon. Glancing around at the rapidly darkening sky, Winslow sung out,

"Get th' mainsail off her, boys! We're goin' ter get it hot an' strong. Holy sailor! look what's comin'!"

Down came the mainsail, and a line of perspiring men standing on the kid and cabin roof fought the rebellious canvas with curses and fists. The stops had just been passed when the squall struck the vessel and the air became livid with stinging rain and sleet. Over and over went the old *Valfreya*, until the deck was like the side of a house, and the caldron of white water to leeward bubbled up to the coamings of the hatch.

The wind rose from a snore to a shriek, and the air was gray with rain, sleet and flying spray.

"Get th' gripes over th' dories!" yelled Winslow as he struggled with Bill Jackson at the wheel.

Henderson, Burke and Thomas stood up to their waists in water at the lee nest of dories, when a burst of green sea came hurtling over the bows and enveloped them. There was a shout from Henderson as he lost his grip and went over the rail, and the skipper, looking up, saw what had happened in a flash. Leaving the wheel in Jackson's hands, he took a turn of the main-sheet around his arm and jumped over the side as a yellow bundle swirled by the vessel's quarter. Clutching at it with iron fingers and bawling for help, he and Henderson were quickly hauled aboard by willing hands.

"Geewhittaker!" panted Winslow as he cast the rope off his arm. "That was a narrer shave! Git Henderson below inter th' foc'sle, some o' you, an' git Cookee ter give him a mug o' somethin' hot. My blame' arm is nearly outer j'int!"

It was but an incident of a few moments, but it was sufficient to deify the young skipper with the men. In the foc'sle, hardened old trawl-haulers swallowed their quids and swore profanely in their excitement.

"Ain't he a bird?" cried old Jimmy, rummaging in the shack locker. "Sink me ef I ever ship with any other skipper than young Winslow, an' ter think I raised him in my dory. Cripes! It's the proud man I am to-day!"

And Henderson, staggering around the reeling foc'sle floor, cursed luridly by way of showing his gratification.

Amid the admiring comments of his crew, Winslow's voice rolled down the scuttle:

"Come on thar', fellers, this ain't no holiday! Weather's easin' off, so git yer dories out an' we'll pick up th' gear."

With wonderful alacrity the men, Henderson and all, sprang for the deck, swung their boats out and towed astern. Winslow steered, while the cook, up in the fore-rigging, skinned his eyes for the swinging black balls on the trawl-buoys. As they picked them up the dories cast off, and

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pulling for their respective trawls commenced hauling. When they came alongside again, the deck-pens showed a good thousand pounds.

"That brings us up to seventy-seven thousand pounds for the eight days," muttered Winslow, nursing his bruised arm. "Now for Hanson. To-morrer's th' thirtieth, an' th' wind's fair for th' run to th' Seal Island."

The catch was soon cleaned and stowed away, and calling Thomas to relieve the wheel, Winslow hailed,

"Give her th' jib, boys! Man th' pumps, an' git everything stowed an' lashed down, an' Jimmy, swing her off west b'north!"

Under her four lowers, the old schooner swung like a race-horse for the rendezvous with a northeaster blowing half a gale over the starboard quarter. Crooning softly to himself, the young skipper watched the wild lurches and swoops of his vessel with a real, glad smile on his haggard, care-worn face. Thomas, from the wheel, called to him:

"Hey, Harry boy, ye've done well—ye've made a high-line fare; now you go below an' turn in. Ye haven't had a full hour's snooze sence we left Anchorville, so go below I say. I reckon we kin look after this ol' hooker now!"

"All right, you ol' tough," answered Winslow with a laugh. "I'll go. Call me when ye sight th' Brazil or Hanson."

V

SLAMMING for the island with a creaming bone in her teeth, the old schooner lurched and pounded over the seas and raised the rendezvous ahead on the morning of the next day. Though several schooners were in sight, no sign of the *Minnehaha* was to be seen, and Winslow kept the *Valfreya* jogging off the island all forenoon. The barometer was going down again, and there was a promise of more wind and plenty of it. While the gang were below at dinner, Henderson sung out in a hurricane roar:

"Oh, skipper! here's our man, an' hoofin' it like th' mill tail o' Tophet!"

Winslow, with a hot potato in his hand, leaped up the foc'sle ladder.

"Aye, that's him," he said after a glance at the vessel bearing down on them. "Up on deck, fellers, an' stand by! We're goin' to hev some wind soon, an' we'll either land in hell or Anchorville by this time to-morrer!"

The *Minnehaha* swung down on the wings of the breeze, and Winslow drew away on his jumbo to meet her. Both vessels, their crews lining the rails, drove through the green combers side by side until a scant fifty yards separated them.

Hanson was the first to speak:

"Hey, you Winslow! Are ye ready?"

"Aye, I'm ready for you!"

"Swing away, then!"

Trimming their sheets and jigging up the halyards, the rival crews shouted ruddy greetings at each other, and the two schooners made a grand sea picture as they tore along through the heaving lift of sullen gray-green water. Overhead a murky sky patched with ragged storm-clouds frowned upon the smart semi-knockabout and her dingy, sea-worn adversary as they reared and plunged over the surging waste of roaring, creaming sea with their sails bellied iron hard and full to the send of the breeze.

The *Minnehaha* appeared to be lighter in the water than her opponent, and under her immense sails hauled ahead a trifle. Winslow, watching her and the sky to windward, spoke quietly:

"Here's where my topmasts come in handy. Git th' stays'l an' th' balloon up, fellers!"

Up went the staysail to loo'ard, and when the big balloon climbed the foretopmast-stay the *Valfreya* was no longer dry, but punched her sharp bows into the heaving crests and scooped whole seas aboard. In the forecastle they thundered down the half-drawn scuttle, the ventilator and the galley chimney, and soon Cookee gave up the job of preparing supper.

"It's no use, boys. You'll have ter mug-up at the shack locker till we git ter port or smooth water. I can't cook anythin' with a crazy sail-carryin' skipper an' a gol-durn submarine of a vessel puttin' me fire out an' wallopin' me pots all over th' foc'sle."

And after placing a ginger cake, some pumpkin pie and doughnuts into the fisherman's quick lunch, he rolled into his bunk.

The *Valfreya* to loo'ard hauled ahead of the *Minnehaha* until the long-threatening squall came swirling down. The Hanson schooner, up in the wind and with her sails shaking, was blotted from view by the curtain of whirling hail and sleet which tore like smoke across the wind-harried waters

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and hove the *Valfreya* down on her beam ends. *Bang!* Away went the staysail like a piece of cheese-cloth. Men cursed and shouted; sails flapped and banged; and above the snore of the wind and the thunderous booming of the sea Winslow's voice could be heard.

"All right, bullies," he roared. "She's doin' nicely. Let everything hang!"

The *Valfreya* was tearing along with her lee rail under and the foam spurting inboard. In the lee scuppers a miscellaneous collection of brooms, baskets, draw-buckets, and loose ends of gear trailed and danced, and aloft the slender topmasts bent like reeds. Thomas at the weather wheel glanced at the skipper, who was straining at the spokes with his hair tossing in the wind and with the fire of excitement in his flushed cheeks and eyes.

"Holy Peter, skipper! Some wind, eh?"

"Aye," replied Winslow with a laugh. "A little wind—jest what we want. D'ye notice, Jimmy, how nice she travels on her beam—like a greased plank on edge."

Glancing aloft at the masts, Jimmy murmured a prayer under his breath. It was short and sweet—a fisherman's prayer:

"I hope t' God th' ol' hooker'll stand th' racket!"

The night came with a shroud of fog, and the *Valfreya* under her four lowers, gaff-topsail on the main, and balloon, crashed through the smoking mist like a ghost, encircled by a ring of white water which hissed and gleamed phosphorescently as they tore along.

By eight o'clock it was more than she could stand. The seas flooded the decks and, careering aft, sluiced over the stern. Winslow and Thomas had to be lashed to the wheel-box, and steered for the best part of the time up to their thighs in creaming water. Henderson came aft to relieve Thomas at the wheel.

"Skipper," he said placing his mouth to Winslow's ear, "th' riggin' is workin' loose. I cal'late her ol' masts are rotten in th' steps. Better git th' light sails off."

Winslow made a negative gesture.

"We're all right, bully!" he bawled. "Let 'em hang!"

THEY hung until nine o'clock, when the big balloon caught an extra heavy gust and, snapping the foretopmast off short with the jerk, brought the spar crashing downward by the run.

Winslow saw what had happened, and swinging the vessel off, sung out to the gang:

"Out ye go an' cut that foretopm'st stay adrift! Save th' sail ef ye kin."

The topsail on the main took a freak also and went of its own accord, leaving nothing but the bolt-ropes to show where it had been. The skipper laughed.

"Oh, this is shameful!" he cried. "What awful rags this poor ol' hooker has got! I cal'late Clarence Dickey'll hev th' gall ter ask me ter pay for his ol' dog's-wool kites. Waal, waal, as long as th' lowers hold we'll be all right. Wonder where Hanson is?"

"Oh, he ain't far away, I guess," replied Henderson. "I'm afraid o' th' riggin', skipper; it's workin' powerful loose, an' ef them stays an' shrouds go slack we'll be losin' th' sticks. Better get some sail off'n her while we got th' chanst."

"Is that what's worryin' you?" answered Winslow. "Waal, I'll soon fix that. You go for'ard an' rouse out th' gang——"

"An' git th' mainsail reefed, eh?"

"No, no, Jack! Git them out an' tell them ter git some narrow pen-boards an' some rope. Lash th' boards outside th' riggin', port an' starb'd, then pass yer ropes across from side to side an' sway 'em taut with th' watch tayckle. That'll take up all th' slack."

Winslow threw the vessel into the wind while the operation of setting up the slack rigging was being carried out, and as soon as it was done, he hove the wheel over again, and the *Valfreya*, protesting in every timber of her ancient fabric, swung off into the night.

With a steadily increasing gale, the old vessel's antics became positively appalling. She plunged, swooped and staggered, and fetched up against the seas with a shock which hove the men out of the upper bunks in the foc'sle and sent all the plates and dishes off the galley-racks on to the floor. The gang began to get a trifle scared, and after being hove around the foc'sle like peas in a pod amid the darkness and misery of inrushing seas, they came scrambling aft in a body.

"Holy Sailor!" cried Andy Watson, who was visibly frightened. "She's like a basket for'ard, skipper! Th' foc'sle floor has a foot o' water sloppin' around it, an' th' place is like —— with th' lid off!"

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"Her blame' plankin' is openin' up!" cried Burke. "Sure, whin I was tryin' ter hang inter me bunk, I c'd ha' shoved me han's inter th' seams ivery time she stretched herself over a sea. Th' forem'st is wobblin' aroun' in th' foc'sle like a spar-buoy in a tide rip. It's somethin' sinful! Hadn't we better git th' mains'l off her an' heave to?"

Winslow glanced steadily at the compass and ignored the question. Hanging on to the wheel, he gave her a spoke every now and again and squinted at the big mainsail. "Aye," he said with a smile, "she's a trifle old, but she's got a fine new mains'l—a mains'l, fellers, that'll stand anythin'."

"That's all right, skipper," protested Jackson. "Th' mains'l may stand, but th' vessel won't. I think she sh'd be hove to. Hanson'll never carry sail in this weather."

The young skipper looked around at the anxious faces and laughed.

"Ha! ha!" he cried. "So ye're afraid I'm goin' ter drown ye all? Say, boys, you jest go amidships thar' an' take a little spell at th' pumps. It'll get her a little lighter, even tho' th' extry water we're carryin' makes grand ballast."

Without any more arguing, the men turned to and pumped, and it was as well they did so, as under the strain of sail-carrying, the old schooner was leaking badly. While the men were spelling one another the lookout, hanging on to the windlass for'ard, reported a vessel's red light dead ahead, and Winslow swung off and showed his port light in time to avoid a collision. A schooner under reefed foresail and riding sail lurched by, and he hailed her:

"What vessel's that?"

"*Clara Willis* of Anchorville! Who's that?"

"*Valfreya!*"

"Hullo, Harry!" came the hail. "What luck?"

"Pretty fair—seventy-seven thousand!"

"Good boy—look out—North Ledge buoy adrift!"

"Oh, ho!" muttered Winslow. "Th' Nor' Ledge buoy's adrift! That's bad, as we oughter sight that soon." Aloud he cried. "Fellers, keep yer eyes peeled for-'ard. Th' Nor' Ledge buoy's adrift!"

AFTER midnight the wind eased off, and the men who toiled at the pump-brakes noted the fact with satisfaction. At one o'clock Henderson yelled, "Breakers ahead!" with startling suddeness.

"Th' Ledge!" cried Winslow, and with beads of perspiration pouring off his face, he hove the wheel over and brought the schooner to the wind. "To th' main-sheet, boys!" he roared. "Let her jib fly!" And around the gallant vessel came on her heel and swung away from the danger on the opposite taek. "That was nearly our finish," he murmured. "God bless Henderson's eyesight! It was a miracle he wasn't asleep."

Standing out to sea again in a dense fog, the *Valfreya* pounded and smashed through the combers for another hour, and from his post at the wheel the eagle-eyed Winslow espied a schooner's green light winking out of the misty darkness. Staring hard at it, he cried to Thomas:

"I wonder who that is? It ain't th' *Willis*, but it might be Hanson—it is Hanson, by all that's holy! Listen!" Above the howl of the gale could be heard the clanging toll of a bell-buoy, and in the lift of the rain squalls a light flashed intermittently over the waters. "That's th' buoy adrift!" cried Thomas. "Hist! Hanson's hailin' us!"

"What vessel's that?"

"Heaven an' earth!" ejaculated Thomas. "He don't know us with our stump fore-m'st." Placing his hand over the skipper's mouth to enjoin silence, old Jimmy thundered back, "*Clara Willis* of Anchorville. Who's that?"

"*Minnehaha!*" After a momentary pause came the hail again: "Seen anything o' *Valfreya?*"

"Aye!" bawled Thomas. "Met her runnin' inter Cobtown Harbor an hour ago!"

"Is that th' Nor' Ledge light yonder?"

"Aye!" shouted Thomas again. "That's th' buoy"—then, in a low tone—"adrift!"

As they whirled off into the gloom again they could hear Hanson shouting orders to heave his vessel to.

"Ho! ho!" laughed old Jimmy. "This is rich. Hanson thinks he's all right in heavin' to when he thinks we're in Cobtown Harbor. He thinks that's th' Nor' Ledge buoy yander, an' thinks he's safe off here till daylight. Ha! ha!"

Rounding up on their course again, and well clear of the dangerous unguarded ledge, the *Valfreya* swashed through the tide rips, while her crew toiled at the pumps to free

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her of the water she drained in at every pitch. With the water boiling in the lee scuppers and her main-boom bending like a bow to the pressure of the wind in the sail, she snored for Anchorville with a cascade of creaming, smoking water sluicing over the bows, while Winslow steered at the wheel like a mechanical man.

Thomas and Henderson tried to get him to go below for a sleep, but he was obdurate. With eyes glowing under eyebrows encrusted with salt; face haggard and set in tired lines; and a resolute mouth, he answered them harshly:

"No! I'm goin' ter stay here until this ol' hooker is safely tied up at Dickey's wharf, so don't bother about me havin' a sleep. I'll git all th' sleep I want when we git to home."

VI

CAPTAIN FRED HANSON on the *Minnehaha* superintended the stowing of the mainsail and kept an eye on the Nor' Ledge buoy light. Once or twice as he glanced at it, he thought that something was wrong, but as he was not very sure of his position he relied on the information given him by the *Clara Willis* and decided he'd heave-to off the Ledge till daylight. He was satisfied that the *Valfreya* had run into Cobtown for shelter, and he felt reasonably sure that the old vessel could never have stood the weather of the night.

"She'll be all wracked ter pieces, I cal'late," mused Hanson, "an' will probably sink at her moorin's in Cobtown. She must ha' bin half full o' water when I saw her last, as she rode purty deep. Waal, I reckon I'll take Winslow's three hundred away from him to-day."

About four in the morning a schooner under reefed foresail and riding-sail jogged slowly past and hailed him:

"That you, Hanson?"

"Aye!" answered that worthy. "What vessel's that?"

"*Clara Willis!*"

Hanson jumped.

"Th' *Clara Willis?*" he cried. "Why, —— it, th' *Clara Willis* passed us two hours ago! What's she flyin' around like this for?"

"Oh, Hanson!" came the hail again.

"Aye!"

"Nor' Ledge buoy's adrift—look out!"

"Buoy's adrift!" ejaculated Hanson in surprise. "By th' Great Hook Block, I knew there was somethin' wrong——"

"Say, skipper," cried a man, "that couldn't ha' bin th' *Clara Willis* that passed us afore. Th' *Willis* had no topmasts an' that's her over there now, while that other craft had stump forem'st an' a maintopm'st!"

Hanson whipped out an oath.

"Hey, *Willis* ahoy! Have ye seen th' *Valfreya?*"

"Aye! Passed—four hours ago—off Nor' Ledge—might ha' struck!"

The skipper of the *Minnehaha* started as if he were shot.

"Holy Sailor!" he cried. "Passed him four hours ago near th' Ledge, an' passed us two hours ago standin' out! ——! I've been fooled! Winslow must ha' lost his foretopm'st, an' it was that old swab Thomas that hailed me. Sink me for a stupid bone-head!"

And Hanson broke into a string of bitter curses. Yelling for his crew to set the mainsail, he drew away and pounded hotfoot up the bay. The wind had moderated, and when morning broke clear with a heavy sea running, the *Valfreya* was raised ahead.

"There he is!" cried the lookout, "an' hoofin' it under all his rags!"

"We're licked, skipper!" cried a man. "Winslow has trimmed us, an' no error, an' fooled you inter th' bargain."

Hanson turned and anathemized the candid one in words which were lurid in the extreme:

"Let me hear a croak from any o' you," he screamed, "an' I'll boot him over th' rail!"

With a spanking breeze, the *Valfreya* made the entrance to Anchorville Bay, and jibing, staggered up the harbor with the *Minnehaha* a scant mile astern.

Crowds flocked to the wharves; steamboats whistled; crews lined the rigging of the vessels anchored in the bay and shouted rude welcomes, and the Fishery Protection cruiser forgot the dignity of the service for once and saluted with a blast from her siren. Clarence Dickey on the end of his own wharf shouted meaningless phrases to the tired, sea-worn Winslow at the wheel, and Jimmy Thomas laughed and swore alternately, declaring with hearty emphasis that it was "a grand-stand finish!"

As they swung into the wharf, the *Val-*

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freya's weary crew hove the pump-brakes down with a sigh of relief, and stood by the halyards, as Winslow shouted!

"Let her come well up th' wharf, or she'll sink!"

And relinquishing the post he had held for so many long hours, he reeled below into the cabin and threw himself down on the locker.

"Heavens! but I'm tired," he muttered, and clad in his sea-boots and oilskins, he dropped asleep, heedless of the tramping of the crew overhead and the shouting of the people on the wharf. A crowd jumped aboard the old vessel as soon as she was tied up and made for the cabin companion. Jimmy Thomas met them.

"Let him be for a spell, boys," he said, as he drew the slide. "He's all in—had no sleep for th' last ten days."

And even Dickey himself was compelled to turn away.

An hour later Thomas stepped down into the cabin and shook the sleeping Winslow gently.

"Harry, boy," he said, "here's a letter for you." The young skipper reached for it sleepily and thrust it into his pocket. "Come on, Harry, get up to the office. Ol' Dickey's nearly crazy, an' wants to see you badly."

THROWING off his oilskins mechanically, he climbed on deck, and staggering ashore, reeled his way through the congratulating crowds. At the office Dickey arose from his chair with a jump when Thomas and Winslow entered.

"Oh, you young devil!" almost screamed the vessel owner, as with joy in his eyes he grabbed Winslow's hand and pumped it vigorously. "You've given me a session all right. What with my gal Isabel, her mother an' your mother, I've come through hell in th' last ten days for sendin' you out in th' ol' *Valfreya*. Bill McCall is in port, an' he pumped them scuppers-full with th' yarns o' that ol' hooker, an' by th' Lord, Harry, they were sayin' I was responsible for yer lives, an' that I was a fool to trust a boy with that vessel, old, wracked an' leaky as she is!

"Then, when they heard o' yer bet with Fred Hanson, they were flockin' in here—Mrs. Thomas especially"—Jimmy winced—"an' wantin' me ter git th' Fishery boat to go after ye an' tow ye home. None o' them thought ye'd ever come through th' weather we've had lately, but I knew, Harry—dang it! I knew ye'd turn up all right. Oh, but I've had a session!"

Mopping his forehead, he continued, "Th' boys tell me ye hev around seventy-seven thousand aboard—that's great work, a high-line fare, an' ye've beaten Hanson. Oh, say he is mad! Ye've licked him in fishin' as well, fur he's only got sixty-five thousand—struck an awful run o' dogfish, he says."

Winslow waited until the excited Dickey was finished, "Will you be overhaulin' th' *Valfreya* for me, Mr. Dickey?"

"Th' *Valfreya!*" ejaculated Dickey. "No, sir! Th' *Valfreya* is goin' where she sh'd ha' gone long ago—to th' junk-pile! But, Harry, you're goin' to take a little trip to Shelburne, see? An' ye're goin' to superintend th' buildin' an' riggin' o' my new McManus semi-knockabout—a hunder'-an'-ten-ton schooner t' be called th' *Isabel Dickey*, an' when she's ready you'll take this *Isabel Dickey* out fishin'. By th' by, my gal hez bin drivin' me nearly crazy about you. What's in th' wind, hey?"

Thomas stooped down and whispered in his ear, "Th' letter, Harry. Did ye read her letter? She gave it to me this mornin'."

Winslow, though slightly dazed with his good fortune, understood. Hastily excusing himself, he left the chuckling vessel owner and whipped the letter from his pocket. Opening it with fingers that trembled, he scanned the lines with eager eyes:

DEAR HARRY:

I have behaved something shameful to you, and was really only joking at the dance. I tried to send you a note before you sailed, but missed you by a few minutes. I meant what I said to you at Murphy's, and if you come along this evening you can have my answer. You have made good.

ISABEL DICKEY.

P. S.—My father knows about this, and I have made him promise to give you a new vessel whether you won or not.

With a face illuminated with joy, the young skipper gave a boyish "whoop!" and grasping old Jimmy's arm, cried:

"Hey, you ol' tough! Go an' git that money from Bill Watson th' sailmaker; take a hundred of it, an' blow th' gang to a little something from me. Tell them also that I want them to go fishin' with me in the *Isabel Dick*—— No! I reckon that name'll have to be changed."

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THE END

BY STEPHEN ALLEN REYNOLDS

I WAS unable to sleep. Possibly the teamster had brewed the evening coffee too strong, or maybe the flooring of the ambulance was too hard for one accustomed to the hair and felt mattresses of the East. I threw off my coverings, donned my shoes, great-coat and campaign hat and started for a stroll.

The mules, hitched to the pole of the ambulance, were munching the last wisps of their ration of alfalfa; the dull embers of our evening camp-fire gave off the acrid odor peculiar to smoldering mesquite; and I could make out the dim outlines of Teamster Wade near by, smothered in army blankets.

Far to the northward the moon was sailing over the twin mountain peaks of Dos Cabezas; to the eastward the skyline of the Arizona highlands was pierced by the jagged spurs of the Chiricahua Range; while behind me, to the southward, stretching through the starlit night to the Mexican line and beyond, lay the valley of the San Simon.

I was upon the threshold of a new life—a life very strange to me after a year in the comfortable barracks at Governor's Island, with little or nothing to break the monotony of an army surgeon's existence, save occasional urban trips theaterward and return. The Surgeon-General had favorably endorsed my application for a detail to frontier service, and after some little delay I had been assigned to look out for the physical welfare of the little two-troop cavalry post of Camp Bell, eighty-odd miles south of the nearest railroad station on the Southern Pacific. Teamster Wade, with his pair of mules and the post ambulance, had been sent up to meet me.

As I cast away the butt of my cigarette after a brisk walk in the keen night air of the mountains, I approached the fire, and with an appetite whetted by sleeplessness and exercise, rummaged about among the camp kit for a piece of the teamster's Dutch-oven bread and a slice of cold bacon to go along with it.

"Anything I can do for yuh, Doctor?"

Wade had left his blankets, and approached the fire, rubbing his hands.

"Nothing, thank you," I answered. "I felt like having a little bite. You'd better go back to your blankets and get your sleep."

"Somehow or other I don't feel sleepy, Doctor," said Wade as he placed a handful of wood upon the dying fire and fanned it into a blaze with the brim of his hat.

I devoured my bread and bacon, lit another cigarette, and passed the case to Wade. He accepted the case rather gingerly, selected a cigarette, and lit it from a flaming sprig of mesquite.

"Beggin' your pardon, Doctor, but aren't these English cigarettes which come packed a hundred in a tin box with a green label on it?" asked Wade. He had inhaled a whiff or two of the smoke, and was scrutinizing the tube of tobacco closely.

"Why, no," I replied. "They're not English cigarettes, although they're very popular in England. They're made in Egypt, come packed a hundred in a tin

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box, and so far as I know they're the only Egyptian cigarette that come in a tin box with a green label."

"It's a mighty funny thing how the smell of this cigarette takes me back ten years," observed the teamster, after a period of silence. "I can take my oath that they're the same brand that poor 'Suds' Trevor used to smoke. You're the second man to bring 'em into Arizona unless I'm badly mistaken."

"Who was this man Trevor?" I asked, scenting a story.

Here it is:

HE WAS an enlisted man in the Seventh Cavalry, Wade made answer as he squatted down beside the fire. He made history right here in this very valley, and there's not an old-timer in the Seventh, or a settler along the San Simon between the Tonto Basin and Rucker's who'll ever forget him.

I was servin' an enlistment in the Seventh when he joined us at Fort Grant. He gave his name as "Frederic Trevor," and he certainly was the strangest lookin' rookie who ever came out from the East to us. We were all sittin' out on the porch in front of B Troop's quarters one mornin' after guard-mount, when along came Trevor ridin' a horse he'd borrowed at the railroad station thirty miles away. His get-up was great, for he had on a swell Stetson hat, khaki ridin' togs, and English-style puttee leggings. He looked so good to us that when Corporal Snyder took him for a new officer and called out "Attention!" we all dropped our pipes, jumped to our feet and gave him the regulation salute as he passed by.

He pulled up at the guard-house, spoke to the corporal of the guard, and then rode up to the adjutant's office. We were all wonderin' who he was, when we got a big surprise, for who should show up in the squad-room for the vacant bunk near the door but the gent with the puttee-leggings and swell ridin' breeches.

He got his nickname "Suds" the very first day. It happened in this way: The troop clerk took him over to the quartermaster's stores, and finally brought him back to the quarters with his new uniform and other equipments. He put on the blue, stuffed his other goods into his barrack-box, and then came out on the porch where we were all waitin' for mess-call. He had a little bundle in his hand, and asked one of the boys where he could get some washin' done.

Snyder was sore on account of salutin' a man not entitled to it, and we'd all been guyin' him about it. He saw what he thought was a chance to get even with the swell rookie, so he pointed across the parade to the commandin' officer's house, told Trevor to go up on the front stoop, ring the bell, and ask for Miss Evans. He recommended Miss Evans as a good laundress, and said that her charges were but a dollar a month.

We had all we could do to keep our faces straight until the recruit got out of hearin', because Miss Evans was a maiden lady with a spicy temper. She was a relation of the Colonel's, and was keepin' house for him while his wife was visitin' back East. The joke had often been played on green recruits before, but when they bit, it generally ended by the servant answerin' the bell and tellin' the rookie to go over to Soapsuds Row and not be fooled by the loafers in the troop quarters.

But the joke had a different endin' in Trevor's case, for just as he mounted the stoop of the Colonel's house, who should come out but "Old Bull" himself, swingin' his ridin' whip, and lookin' for somebody that he could swear at. He spotted Trevor with his little bundle.

"What in —— do you want here?" asked Old Bull.

Trevor came to attention, saluted, and told the Colonel that he wanted to see Miss Evans about his laundry work. It was a new one on Old Bull, and he boiled right over. He roared at Trevor, asked him how long he'd been in the service, and if he didn't know the difference between Officers' Row and Soapsuds Row. Then he wound up by demandin' to know who the man was that had sent him over.

TREVOR was no telltale, though. He told the Colonel that unless he insisted on it he preferred to settle the matter in his own way. He promised Old Bull to lick the man that sent him over, saluted, and came back to the quarters. He tossed his little bundle on to his cot quietly enough, and then marched straight up to Snyder.

"Corporal," said he in an easy, drawlin' sort of a way, "if you'll take off your coat

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with the chevrons on it, we'll step around to the rear of this buildin' and see who's the best man."

Snyder peeled off his coat without a word, but as he was a bigger and heavier man than Trevor, we made him promise that he wouldn't beat up the rookie, who seemed to be made out of the right kind of stuff.

But the fight was a strictly one-sided affair, for Trevor waded into the corporal without even troublin' himself to roll up his sleeves. He was certainly scientific, for he slapped Snyder's face until it was red, pulled his nose and cuffed his ears. Snyder couldn't seem to land on him, and finally, after playin' with him for about five minutes, the rookie swung for the corporal's jaw and put him out of business.

Snyder wasn't a bad feller. He knew that he was outclassed, and so when he got on to his feet and got his senses back, the first thing he did was to shake hands with Trevor. Just then the dinner-call sounded, and we were about to go into the mess-room when who should we see standin' upon the steps leadin' into the quarters but Old Bull. We'd all been so busy takin' in the fight that no one had noticed him. It seems he witnessed the whole business. We were about to skip around the corner of the buildin' when the Colonel held up his hand and ordered us to halt.

"Corporal," said he, as he walked up to where Snyder was standin', "this man has been too easy on you, and you've not been punished enough. I could court-martial you and have you reduced to the ranks and fined, but I'm short of non-coms and I don't believe in takin' away your money, so I'm goin' to punish you in another way. Hereafter, until further orders, I order you to do this man's washin' on the front porch of Troop B's quarters at guard-mount every Monday mornin'. You'll also furnish the soap, and wash his clothes clean."

So sayin', Old Bull turned away and we went in to mess, scarcely believin' our ears.

For several weeks Trevor's washin' was done out on our front porch in full view of the garrison. Every one off duty turned out to laugh at Snyder, and he was on the point of desertin', when Old Bull went East on leave and the matter was dropped. But somehow or other, the nickname of "Suds" got started from the very first, and was fixed on to Trevor.

He was a rather nice-lookin' feller, about thirty years old, and with very quiet manners. He had a little case that he brought with him, and one day when he had it unlocked one of the boys looked over his shoulder and saw some folded papers and some medals of some kind in it.

HE DIDN'T need much recruits' drill, for the second day, after Sergeant Tully had him out mounted for less than an hour, he brought him into the top's office with the remark that the recruit knew more saber-cuts and military wrinkles than he did himself. The top then assigned Trevor to duty, and gave him the only spare horse in the stable, an old Roman-nosed devil by the name of Bedlam.

Bedlam was the toughest piece of horse-flesh in the entire Seventh. There was nothin' in Arizona that could catch him; but he was a vicious animal and had a bad habit of rearin' back and crushin' his rider. Man after man had been hurt, and at the time he was assigned to "Suds" he had been condemned. If the outfit hadn't been short of horses he'd have been taken out and shot long before Trevor joined us.

Funny, but the old devil seemed to take to Trevor after the first few days. In the meantime Trevor had taken him down to the rear of the quartermaster's corral and fought it out like he did with Snyder. Some of the boys that saw the performance say that they never saw such horsemanship, and you know yourself, sir, how some of the Seventh ride. Within three days he had Bedlam followin' him around with his reins free and his nose on the ground. Then Trevor had an interview with the Captain, and begged so hard that the condemnation papers were withdrawn.

Suds never spoke about his family or personal affairs, and all we knew about him after he had been with us for about six months was that he was an Englishman and came of some high-toned family. He received letters with English stamps on 'em every little while; and twice a month, as regular as clockwork, he got a box of those same cigarettes through the mail.

II

FEELING in the breast-pocket of my great-coat, I again produced my cigarette-case and extended it to the teamster. He helped himself to its con-

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tents, and in the brilliance of the starlit night I noticed that he gazed at the cigarette in a manner almost reverent.

Then, as he reached for a brand, he continued:

There was a scar on his face that extended from the right cheek-bone nearly to the point of his jaw. When we asked Suds about it, he told us that a vicious cat had laid his cheek open when he was a baby. It looked more like a saber cut to me, though.

He was popular with the officers, and they were on the point of makin' a corporal of him on account of his superior education, when he slopped over and went on a big tear. It must have been a newspaper item that started him goin', because one evenin' while sittin' in the post-library he suddenly threw down a New York weekly newspaper with a curse and started for the canteen.

He'd never been seen in the canteen until that night, and when he found out that he couldn't buy anything stronger than beer on the Government reservation, he gave a Mexican boy a gold-piece and sent him down to a place called "the Hog Ranch" after mescal. The boy came back on a burro with a five-gallon demijohn full of the stuff, and that night, between Suds and the other booze-fighters in the troop, the quarters was turned into a hell-hole.

The night followin', the same thing happened. He kept it up for a week and never came to his meals. He didn't get blind drunk exactly, but he drank enough to eat a hole in his stomach, and if it hadn't have happened that Bedlam knew all the trumpet calls he'd have certainly gotten into trouble while doin' his mounted drill. As it was, the horse wheeled and turned to the calls and Suds managed to get away with it. As for the fatigue duty and other work, we all helped him out, for he was a generous chap, popular with every man in the troop—not even exceptin' Snyder.

About the end of that week a rumor floated around the post that the Tonto Basin bucks were gettin' troublesome and that we'd probably get a taste of field service before long. On the mornin' of the next day Suds was reported absent from reveille. A patrol was sent after him and finally located him at Willcox, buckin' the faro game at the Gem for big stakes. He was insane with drink and it took three men to strap him into the ambulance that was sent in to the railroad.

Of course his chances for promotion were gone, and the Major commandin' gave him a week in the guardhouse. The Major had just joined us from a long furlough and he didn't know Suds, for after pronouncin' the sentence he said something about bein' ashamed of any man of the Seventh who'd absent himself in the face of probable field service. I was on guard the day of the trial, and I'll never forget the look on Trevor's face as the Major practically accused him of bein' a coward. He grew fairly purple and bit into his lip until the blood came, but managed to hold his tongue.

WHEN he finished his week and came out of the clink, he walked over to the postmaster's and claimed his mail and cigarettes. He then went on with his drinkin', but not so openly as before. He'd just take sip after sip out of a quart flask until it was empty and then send to the Hog Ranch for more.

About three days after Suds came out, thirty-five or forty young bucks broke out of the Tonto Basin Reservation. They'd been distillin' *tizwin* out of the little red berries that grow in the uplands by the means of a piece of rubber hose and a coal-oil tin. They started down this very valley, headin' for the Mexican line, burnin' and shootin' everything before 'em.

Boots and Saddles was sounded as soon as the news came in over the wire, and Troops B and C took to the field with a pack-train followin'. The Apaches stopped at Willcox long enough to pillage the single saloon in town, and that gave us a chance to catch up with some of 'em. We were about abreast of Dos Cabezas when we sighted the first bunch. We had orders to take the Indians prisoners unless they fired on us.

One of the braves pulled up his pony long enough to take a pot shot at us, and then we commenced firin'. There must have been a dozen Apaches in that bunch, and you'd ought to've seen them melt after we'd been firin' a few minutes. Suds was ridin' on my left, and knowin' that he was a crack long-range shot I watched his work. He potted three bucks at six hundred yards while the balance of the troop took care of the others.

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That night when we made camp and the order was given to halt, Suds kept right on at the trot. He acted as if he was deaf, and the Captain sent me after him. I followed him for at least two miles, and every time I'd draw within thirty yards of him he'd tell me to tell the Major that the coward was takin' the trail single handed. There was no use in chasin' that horse Bedlam with a crazy man on his back, so I gave it up as a bad job, rode back to camp and reported.

Bright and early the next mornin' we took up the trail of the main party, and followed it for a week. We had an understandin' with the Mexican Government which allowed us to cross the border, so we kept right on into the wild country. Grain-fed stock tells in the mountains; the signs along the trail grew fresher, and we felt that we were drawin' in on the red devils. We hobbled the horses, doubled the herd-guard nights, and the sentries got orders to challenge but once before shootin'.

IT WAS a raw evenin' in May when we camped at a little water-hole hemmed in on every side by the mountains. The night was very dark, and we were all played out after a hard day's ride. The camp was so quiet that all I could hear was the horses stampin' at the picket-rope a short way down the canyon.

I was just about to doze off, wonderin' if we'd catch up with the Apaches the next day, when all of a sudden I heard a sentry challenge. A few seconds later, his Springfield cracked, and before the echoes died away we were all lined up under the shelvin' wall of the canyon above and below our horses with our carbines at the half-cock. We'd been lookin' for the Indians to make an attempt to steal our horses some dark night, and we were ready for 'em.

But nothing happened. The outpost who fired the shot came in and reported that an Indian creepin' along on his belly had nearly reached him, and that he'd first challenged and then shot him. We deployed as much as we could and, with our guns ready, we started up the canyon. We hadn't gone fifty yards before one of the men stumbled over something. It proved to be a body. It spoke to us in whispers—in our own language.

To make a long story short—it was what was left of Suds. We carried him back to the cook's fire and stirred it into a blaze. The surgeon looked him over first, but shook his head, for in addition to the ugly hole made by the Springfield bullet, there was fully a dozen other wounds more or less serious.

We gave him a drink of water out of a canteen, and I swabbed away the alkali dust which was caked around his bloody nostrils. Hardly a rag remained on his body, and even his leggings were cut to ribbons. He called for the Captain, and while we drew back, he whispered something to him about the box, back at the post. The Captain nodded to him, and then turned away with tears in his eyes.

As I drew near the poor chap, he whispered to me to look in his haversack. What was left of it lay on the ground near the fire, together with his rag of a blouse which the surgeon had cut away. There was nothin' in the haversack but a tin box holdin' three of these cigarettes—the last of 'em. I thought that I knew what he wanted, so I lit one of 'em and placed it between his lips. He thanked me with what turned out to be almost his dyin' breath, took a feeble puff or two, murmured something about makin' a mess of everything; and then, as I was leanin' over him tryin' to make out what he was sayin', the cigarette fell from his lips and his eyes rolled up.

WE BURIED him at daybreak at the head of the canyon, and piled up a big heap of stones over the grave. Then we saddled up and hit the trail, without understandin' what Suds had done, or even imaginin' the hell that he'd been through since he left us. But before campin' that night we knew it all just as well as if he'd lived to tell us. Our scouts found a spot in the trail where Bedlam and his rider had branched off, goin' fast. It seems that Suds had overtaken the main party, flanked 'em, drawn ahead of 'em, and then ambushed 'em single-handed.

He had tied Bedlam some little distance away, and then taken his stand on a rocky shelf which overhung the narrow trail. We counted the bodies of eighteen good Apaches—that is, what the mountain lions had left of 'em; and on the shelf were twenty-five empty shells and a jammed Springfield. Suds hadn't wasted many shots, but he

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couldn't have got 'em all, because farther on down the trail we came aross the carcass of Bedlam with a rawhide Tonto saddle still strapped to it. Those bucks never did care for a McClellan saddle-tree.

We finally ran down the last bunch of the *tizwin* party and made good Indians out of 'em. Then we headed back for the post—the toughest horse and the bravest man in the Seventh Cavalry left behind us.

In due time, the Captain opened up the box that Suds had left behind, and in it were papers which showed that "Trevor" wasn't his name at all. His real name and full title, as I remember it, was "the Right Honorable George Courtenay Trevelyan." He had been a subaltern in Her Majesty's 17th Lancers, and was a "D. S. O.," whatever that is. There was also a divorce paper in the box which showed that he had been separated from one Blanche Devoe Trevelyan; also some silver medals and a bronze star attached to a plain blue ribbon.

The Captain wrote a long letter to England, and a couple of months afterward a representative of the family came over to see about shippin' the remains. Then it leaked out that the feller we had known as "Suds" was one of the bravest officers of a crack English regiment. He had a sabercut on the right cheek which he got from the Arabs at the battle of Tel-el-Kebir while headin' a charge.

His trouble was that durin' his young days he married one of them music-hall singers on account of her pretty face. She led him over a tough road after his ready money was gone, and the family soured on him because he stuck up for her. Then he caught her at some crooked game, and took to drink in order to forget her. When his regiment got back from Egypt she got mixed up with his lieutenant-colonel, and finally ran away with a bandmaster. Poor Suds dog-whipped his superior officer nearly to death, resigned his commission, and came out to Arizona under an assumed name.

We heard long afterward that the New York newspapers had a story in 'em which told how she threw over the bandmaster and came to America herself. That must have been the article which started Suds off on his big tear. It seems that he was proud and could never forget her. About two years ago I saw an artillery lieutenant who was out here on leave from New York. He told some of our officers that the woman in the case is runnin' a manicure parlor up in New York, and that she's as pretty as ever.

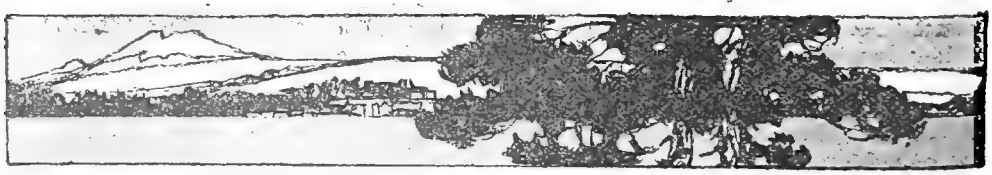
THE teamster gazed into the ashes of the camp-fire and drew out an old briar pipe.

"I've heard that there's people back East that pay a dollar to have their nails trimmed. I'd rather have four bottles of Budweiser," he concluded.

I made no comment; but feeling that my sleeping quarters in the ambulance were cramped, I drew out my blankets and spread them in the open. Throughout the entire night, until the rising sun gilded the twin peaks of Dos Cabezas with the promise of another day, I lay awake, wondering at the weakness of men and the perversity of women.

An English officer and gentleman! A fighting unit of the famous "Death or Glory" Regiment! A proud possessor of the decoration of the Distinguished Service Order! And yet he could not face his greatest enemy; and lived to be called a coward!

God rest his soul, anyway, was my prayer, as I gazed at the fading stars above me. He was a soldier and a man—and we both liked the same brand of cigarettes.



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THE SPIDER'S WEB

by CHARLES EDWARD DANIELL

"SPIDER" MULLINS, "the Ferret," his hat pulled over his shifty gray eyes, sauntered leisurely along First Avenue, headed for the rendezvous of the "bunch," located in the back room of old man McPhee's saloon. Coogan of the Central office, lounging in a doorway on the opposite side of the thoroughfare, engaged in a heated political discussion with a fireman, suddenly caught his breath in the middle of a sentence and paused, a thin, wintry smile creasing his broad, red features.

"Just a minute, Larry," he said dryly, his eyes fixed on the slim, wiry little figure. "There's a stray lamb belonging to me Sunday-school class over there that's lost his way. I've got to put him wise."

He moved briskly across the avenue, and approaching Spider, who with his back turned was intent on lighting a cigarette, tapped him authoritatively on the shoulder. The Ferret glanced up with a pair of startled eyes.

"Ain't you takin' a few chances up here?" demanded the detective with indifferent good humor. "Didn't I give yer Fourteenth Street last month for a dead-line—what?"

Spider's eyes dropped guiltily, then met the officer's with a reproachful look. "'Tain't my fault, Mr. Coogan," he protested in a pained voice. "Feller up on Thirty-second Street borrowed me overcoat, and I had to chase him up to get it. It's pretty cold now."

The detective fixed him with a cynical eye.

"Of course," he agreed wearily. "An' I s'pose you think I believe that spiel." Then his face suddenly hardened. "I'm just goin' to say a couple more words to you," he emphasized in an icy tone. "I'm wise to yer and I'm wise to that bunch of yours. But I ain't got time to be wet-nursing yer roun', and the first time yer put across some monkey trick yer goin' to get pinched like that, d'ye see?" he snapped his big thumb and forefinger sharply. "I'm on to yer. And I'm just waitin' for you to spin one of yer spider webs and get yer feet tangled up in it—understand?" He gave his listener a meaning glance, and crossed the street, savagely chewing his cigar-butt.

Spider's mouth corners drooped sourly. He shrugged his meager shoulders and slouched off, his features twisted into a wry, disgruntled expression. "The big, red-headed four-flusher!" he muttered injuredly. "You'd think he owned the whole State of New York, wouldn't yer? I'd just like to get his goat once, good and hard!" he mused gloomily, and with a furtive glance over his shoulder at his persecutor now a block away, he turned into Twenty-sixth Street and moved rapidly in a westerly direction.

But the encounter left the Ferret in a very melancholy frame of mind, which the dark, dispiriting day only served to color more gloomily. As he trudged along he fished out his last quarter and regarded it with mournful interest. At Third Avenue, he decided to continue to Madison Square where presently he arrived, and dropping into a seat, gazed furtively around.

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A LARGE, florid individual of portly habit and flashy appearance approached the bench. As he gathered up his coat-tails, preparatory to seating himself, he gave the occupant a keen glance, then with a grunt sank into a seat beside the Ferret. The latter's eyes, however, were demurely intent on a party of children near by, and apparently paid no heed. But the proximity of the big man sent a quick thrill of hope to his heart.

From the tail of his eye he was cheered to glimpse a heavy gold chain that crossed the expansive stomach of the newcomer, which anchored a watch in the waistcoat pocket nearest to him. This fact warmed him still more. But when the intruder calmly spread a newspaper across his ample anatomy and, closing his eyes, composed his features for a comfortable nap, Spider felt a sudden glow all over. New York was not such a desert of opportunity after all.

He cast a troubled glance at the passers-by. The stream, however, was perceptibly thinning. The man beside him began to breathe heavily, his head a trifle aslant, his features gratefully relaxed in tranquil repose. Spider cautiously stole a glance, then removed his eyes with a quiet smile. At the moment, no one was passing. The nearest pedestrian was some distance off. He slipped his hand deftly under the newspaper and allowed his finger-tips to creep softly up the capacious waist till they reached the watch, and he was drawing the latter very gently from its housing when his wrist was suddenly seized in an iron grip and the near-victim calmly opened his eyes.

"Well, my man," was the cool, dispassionate remark, "you didn't quite get it, did you?" An appraising glance took Spider in from head to heel, as the speaker sat up, still gripping the wrist. "I'm afraid you're a cheap bungler, my friend," he observed disparagingly. "I'm afraid you're a blacksmith."

His auditor stared, and started to go. He was too profoundly amazed to utter a word.

"What's your hurry?" said the big man good-naturedly. "There's no particular harm done." He measured the Ferret with his cool blue eyes. "How would you like to go to work for me?" He proposed bluntly.

Spider's eyes widened with suspicion. "What to do?" he inquired.

"Well," returned the other with a fine appearance of self-approbation, "my work, just now, is largely philanthropic, when you sum it up. I give and I take, in the business I'm pursuing. One offsets the other, you see," he smiled placidly. "I'm afraid you haven't been so magnanimous in the past. It's been all take, hey?"

The Ferret grinned sheepishly.

"I was about to say," the big man continued, "that your attempt just now struck me as a fumbling job—poor craftsmanship." He bent his head significantly toward the north. "You've been up——"

Spider nodded.

"I rather suspected it. I sized you up that way when I sat down," he shook his head deprecatingly. "No need of that. It's crude." He threw a sharp glance around and pulled out a roll of bills—"Suppose you come down to my place to-night," he said, handing Spider a dollar. "I'd rather not talk to you here. Will you come?"

"Sure! Say, boss, is this on the level?" he eyed the stranger with doubtful amazement.

"Is it?" the philanthropist rose heavily to his feet with a genial smile. "It certainly is. When you hear about it, I think you'll like the proposition." He penciled the address on a card. "Meet me there at seven o'clock to-night," he instructed, "and ask at the door for Mr. Evans," and with a pleasant nod he walked leisurely away.

Spider sat staring blankly after the retreating figure, then his eyes dropped to the dollar in his hand. "That feller got past me all right," he murmured bewilderedly. "Gee! an' he's a dead swell guy, too!"

THAT evening, as the Ferret turned into the street of the address given to him, a taxicab pulled up at the corner, and an imposing figure, garbed as a clergyman of the Church of England, stepped out. The reverend gentleman moved serenely in Spider's direction, passed him with a benign glance, and mounting the steps of a house, inserted his key in the door. Then he paused, an amused expression on his bland countenance, as he watched the Ferret on the sidewalk peering out the numbers.

"Looking for some one?" he inquired smilingly in a helpful tone. "Come in."

The Ferret's eyes fairly bulged. He obeyed with an air of dumb submission, and was conducted through a long bare hall

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to a scantily furnished room. Here his host motioned him to a chair.

"I've been thinking about you a good deal since we met to-day," he said, in a judicial tone, "and I'm convinced you're the very man I want. This work of mine really requires—well, you might say a valet, to make a success of it. Oh no, not that," he assured, as Spider's face lengthened with chagrin; "I can dress myself, and take a bath without help. But your general appearance is admirably adapted to the character I need." He nodded approvingly.

"And I've been thinking, too," he continued blandly, "that we could succeed still better if you would dress for the part—wear livery, you know—the conventional dress of the man-servant. You'd fit the character to a hair." But at the startled expression that suddenly overspread his listener's countenance, he hastened to acknowledge his own thralldom by unbuttoning his clerical frock coat, and exposing seven waistcoats of various hues and patterns beneath. "This is my livery," he announced complacently, "and under those vests I suppose I've got on nine or ten undershirts. That's what gives me my figure," he explained, with a touch of pride.

Spider's eyes nearly popped out of his head.

"Gee, mister!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "You're a lily cooler, you are! I never seen nothin' like that before."

His host's face expressed surprise. "You thought this was my natural figure, hey? Well, not exactly. My appearance always depends on the business in hand. Just now it calls for a certain well-fed dignity and portly carriage. The vests and undershirts give me that."

"So you see," he went on, "I'm not asking you to do anything I wouldn't do myself. This is nothing but a livery after all, and a blamed hot one, too. What do you say?"

The Ferret murmured his willingness, his eyes alight with admiration.

"Then I'll be brief, for I've an appointment to meet a landlord in half an hour. I expect to hire an apartment over on Lexington Avenue. I signed a lease this afternoon for one in Harlem, and to-morrow I expect to engage two more—both uptown. Now, the idea is this," he explained suavely, "I'm a clergyman recently come to the city—the Rev. Mr. Evans. I think you'll admit that my appearance needs no further endorsement, and so I am never asked to give references. Neither am I required to pay down any money, for I always stipulate that the first month shall be allowed free.

"Then I immediately call upon a dozen or more of the neighboring tradespeople, and each is given a small order for provisions. These I arrange to have delivered C. O. D., between six and seven o'clock. But as I am leaving the store I turn back and say quite apologetically, 'By the way —I forgot to mention it—but I've left a twenty-dollar bill with my man at the flat who will receive the goods—if you will kindly send the difference in cash back with the order,' and they bow, and smile, and never fail to do so. Well, that is all there is to it," he added airily. "You are the man, you see, up in the empty flat, and you receive the money and the goods. It's really a very pretty and profitable idea."

Spider's face fell. "And I get pinched!" It sounded like the cry of a wounded animal.

"Not you," assured the strategist. "For I shall suddenly appear down-stairs and explain that my wife was obliged to take the twenty-dollar bill for some immediate call, and promptly draw a check for the amount. See?" he produced a pocket check-book, and exhibited it to his doubting conspirator. "It's on the Rock Hill National Bank. And those boys—why, they take my checks without a question, and their bosses deposit them as they would gold bonds." He smiled gently and pocketed his check-book. "Taking it by and large, it's a very smooth little scheme," he added complacently. "It used to pay me one hundred dollars a crack out in Chicago."

His listener grinned broadly. "Say, mister, that sounds like hot cakes to me. D'ye always get away with it?"

"Never had so much as an inquiry about it—it's just pie," replied the other confidently. "We can clean up five hundred dollars easy in a couple of days," he looked at his watch. "I've got to see that landlord now, but I'll have everything ready for our first job to-morrow. You'd better meet me here at five-thirty sharp. Oh! and by the by, in your character part I shall call you —well, Jerome; that's a good name."

The Ferret smiled feebly. "Name suits me all right," he agreed with a smirk;

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"but I'll tip yer off ter one thing, mister: yer want ter keep yer lamps lit up fer a red-headed flat-foot named Coogan that's fine-toothin' roun' here all the time."

"Detective?"

Spider nodded. "He's a wise guy, too."

His companion gestured reassuringly. "Don't worry," he said with a confident air. "You leave the detective to me."

THE following evening at precisely six o'clock a taxicab rolled up to the corner of Lexington Avenue and —— Street, and a portly clergyman accompanied by his valet—a slim, bleak-faced little man dressed in the close-fitting coat and dicky collar of the man-servant, alighted, and with a word to the chauffeur to wait for them, moved down Lexington Avenue.

The divine's immobile features wore that expression of beatific repose that comes as a reward to the doer of good works. The shifty eyes of the servant, however, peered furtively around, and it was only when they reached a six-story apartment house in the middle of the block, and the clergyman had boldly pressed the janitor's bell that the valet's face relaxed in a thin smile. A woman promptly answered the summons.

"Mrs. Walsh, the janitress, I believe?"

"Yes, yer riverence." Her face was alight with confidence and respect.

"We expect to move in to-night, Mrs. Walsh. The furniture should arrive by seven-thirty, and my family I expect from Chicago at eight o'clock. I've ordered a few things from the grocer's, and my man here," he indicated Spider by a gesture, "will stay and take them in. And, Mrs. Walsh," he handed her a dollar bill, "anything you can do to——"

"Ah, yis, yer riverence. Thank you, sir. I'll see everything is right, sir."

"And the key?"

"Sure, I forgot. One minute, sir," and disappearing, she returned shortly with the key of the apartment, and conducted them up to the third floor, where they entered a flat of seven rooms and bath, all of which she volubly interpreted with the aid of a flickering candle. "And this is the kitchen, out here, yer riverence," she announced.

"And the dumb-waiter," he inquired with a casual air.

"Yes, sir. Here it is;" she opened the little door and manipulated the ropes.

"I see." He turned to Spider. "This will be your post, Jerome. The tradespeople will send the goods up here." He pulled out his watch. "They should be here very soon now. Meanwhile, I think I'll step down to the sidewalk and keep an eye out for the furniture vans." The janitress lit three other candles, and while she was engaged in standing them about the room in their own tallow, he took occasion to add a whispered word of encouragement. "Don't get rattled now," he cautioned. "I'll be downstairs and settle any kick. Pooh! it'll be just like looking for trees out in the woods."

When they had gone, the Ferret took a quick survey of the dead, shadowy kitchen. He was chuckling to himself in the bathroom mirror when he suddenly heard the buzzer go off. He rushed out and projected his head into the dumb-waiter shaft.

"Hi there!" cried a voice from below, "that Evans?"

"Sure," replied Spider, grinning into the shaft.

"Say. There's eighteen dollars in change on the shelf. The boss said you'd send down a twenty-dollar bill."

THE new householder deigned no reply. He was too busy cramming the loose bills into his trousers pocket. Then he proceeded to pile an assortment of canned goods and groceries over on the window-sill. The voice below became once more raucously insistent.

"Hi, up there. There's eighteen dollars in change with those goods and——" but a low murmur of voices followed, and bending over, he could hear the calm, persuasive voice of the clergyman, after which there fell a golden silence.

"Gee! ain't he the big noise—what?" he whispered exultantly to himself as he stood surveying the display of edibles. With an eye to the future, he slipped a couple of cans of sardines into his coat pocket, and was regarding a bunch of smoked herring feloniously when the buzzer whizzed again. This time he extracted seventeen dollars, and at the end of half an hour the Ferret's pocket bulged with crushed greenbacks. Massed on the floor and window-sills were stacked sufficient nourishment to outfit a junior North Pole expedition, while cuts of roast beef, legs of lamb, sausages and fish reposed fraternally side by side on the gas-range. Spider stood back and viewed his surroundings with

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startled eyes. He had never seen such a congestion of good cheer within his reach before.

Then once more the buzzer sounded, and a voice below called up "Evans." Spider vouchsafed no reply, but at the third demand he answered, "Sure, send her along," and a twelve-pound turkey came rattling up. But to his chagrin he found that no money accompanied it, and the voice in the basement yelled up, "It's C. O. D. two dollars and seventy cents." The Ferret returned no answer, relying on the genius below to smooth the matter over, and removing the turkey, lined it up with the beef and sausages on the gas-range. But it struck him as odd that the money was lacking.

The man in the basement continued to yell lustily, and a puzzled frown wrinkled Spider's forehead. Then, a loud voice on the floor below started a heated discussion with the butcher, and presently a step sounded on the stair coming up two at a time. Spider's heart gave a quick throb, and, with the resistless impulse of the sneak-thief to hide, he instinctively dodged into the kitchen closet and closed the door.

A large man in his shirt sleeves bounded into the room, then stopped suddenly.

"Jiminy Christmas Agnes!" he exclaimed with bulging eyes, "What is it—a delicatessen shop?"

Spider trembling behind the door saw him through the keyhole grab the turkey off the gas-range and tuck it safely under his arm. Then the intruder stood doubtfully, his eyes alert and suspicious, peering into the shadowy corners of the room. Finally, with a last searching glance, he passed out, and hastily descended the stairs.

FROM below a chorus of inquiring voices sounded. Wild-eyed, the Ferret crept out of the closet and stood hesitating. It was clear to him now that something was wrong, and his only chance was the fire-escape. He raised the window gently, and stepping over the canned goods, alighted on the iron scaffolding. A dog yapped and whined eagerly in the black area beneath him, and he caught the deep tones of a pacifying voice. Like a flash it came to him that he was cut off—trapped.

The roof was the only chance left. With the agility of a cat he began to climb. As he reached the flat above he saw that the kitchen was brilliantly lighted and the window wide open. A maid stood by a table paring potatoes, and humming softly to herself. Spider considered a moment, weighing his chances, then clutching the two cans of sardines he had pocketed, he appeared suddenly at the window, a startling apparition, and stepped lightly inside. The girl flung up her hands with a choking cry and her face went deathly white. The knife rattled to the floor from her nerveless fingers and she sank into a chair.

"Don't yer get skeered now," reassured Spider under his breath. "See?" he laid the sardines on the table. "The dumb-waiter's gone broke," he explained breathlessly, "and the boss said to get 'em to yer sure," he glanced nervously around. "How d'ye get out?"

The girl with her hand on her heart, and her head toppled to one side was incapable of speech. The Ferret gently pushed a door open leading into a narrow passage—glided through the flat without encountering a soul and emerged on the outer hall. Then stealing down the stairs in the dark, he crouched behind the balusters and waited, every nerve stinging like a live wire.

He could hear a murmuring conversation in the lower hall. The words "clergyman" and "fake" caught his ear, and he vaguely wondered what had become of his pompous confederate. The thought that followed that, however, sent a quick stab of agony into his cowering eyes, for he knew only too well what capture would mean. His lips tightened, and he drew a knife from his hip pocket. He determined to sell his liberty at a price this time.

He slipped cautiously and silently down the stairs, hugging the rail closely and now and again pausing as some unfamiliar sound struck his ear. Reaching the second landing he stole noiselessly along on his rubber heels and was turning down the last flight when a dog came yelping up the outside steps, followed by a man.

Then he heard a voice say, "He must have got away by the roof, Jim. I'm going to take the dog up," and the next moment sounded the ascending tread. He decided instantly to make a run for it. Stealing softly down till within striking distance of the other, he made a sudden rush and flew past the man, the dog yelping and snapping at his heels. Then, suddenly, two figures loomed up before him, and the next mo-

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ment Spider was lying ingloriously on his back.

A passer-by, hearing the rumpus, ran quickly up the steps and inquired the trouble.

"Sneak-thief, hey? Let's see his face." He was a tall, wiry individual with cool blue eyes and a commanding manner. "Turn him around to the light, and let's have a look at him."

There stood the Ferret up in the doorway where the pale rays of a neighboring lamp exposed a heartsick, wo-begone expression on the lean features of the captive. The newcomer burst out laughing.

"Well, upon my word!" he exclaimed. "If it isn't 'Crimpy' Isaacs!" He turned to Spider's captors. "Why, gentlemen, society owes you a vote of thanks. You've hooked one of the cleverest little 'dips' in the business." He displayed a badge under his coat. "Guess I ought to know, don't you think?"

His auditors stared admiringly. "So you're a detective, eh?"

"Well, rather!" He pulled out a pair of steel handcuffs. "We'll just slip these bracelets on, Crimpy," he said quietly, encircling the Ferret's wrists, "and, gentlemen, down at headquarters we could have sworn that he was working the West—a thousand miles from New York." He shook his head dubiously. "You never can tell where they really are, though," he added significantly, "although I think we can prophesy where this little man may reside for a while," he laughed lightly. "Come on, Crimpy, my boy," and gripping the latter tightly by the arm, they marched off.

IN SILENCE they pursued their way up the thoroughfare. Not a word was spoken. Spider's eyes caught sight of the familiar taxi standing around the corner under the electric burner. In a moment more he was unceremoniously bundled into it, and the lights of Lexington Avenue flew past them like winging fireflies.

"My Gawd! Mister!"

"Don't excite yourself, my friend." The wrist ornaments slipped off and into the pocket of the speaker. "You didn't think I'd leave a pal like that, did you?" he laughed easily. "It was a silly mix-up anyway. Do you know what the trouble was?"

"No."

"That fellow on the floor below was named Evans. When I heard the row over the turkey I knew just what would happen, so I made tracks for the taxi and peeled off."

Spider's jaw dropped. "And the detective fake——"

"Sure. I had it in the cab. That's an old trick, my boy."

The Ferret sank back on the seat with a look of mingled admiration and awe.

"Gee, mister!" he gasped. "You're the big noise all right."

His companion laughed, then his face suddenly sobered. The cab had swung into a side street and was whirling through the night at a pace far exceeding the speed limit. Lights flashed and disappeared—they seemed to be cannonading through a blur of lambent flame. The big man's features set grimly, and a glint of terror sprang into his eyes.

"Something's wrong!" he exclaimed tensely, and leaning forward peered anxiously at the chauffeur. As he did so, the latter adjusted a whistle to his lips and blew shrilly again and again. Then, as Spider and his confederate wrenched at the cab doors, the machine suddenly slowed down and stopped before a police-station. Four officers quickly surrounded it, and a broad-shouldered man with a carroty red head received them with an air of grim approval.

"Good business, Jerry," he applauded with a nod to the chauffeur. "I'll make you good with the old man for this." Then to the sham clergyman, whom two policemen were assisting to the sidewalk, he gave a tired, cynical smile.

"Glad to meet yer, Wilson," he said with satirical good humor. "Chicago thinks a whole lot of you, and has made us promise to treat yer like a prince." He nodded meaningly. "And we're goin' to keep our word all right." Then he turned his eyes on the dejected, wo-begone little figure that followed the big man out of the taxi.

"Hello, Ferret!" he taunted, trying to catch the shifty eyes of the one-time valet. "How about it—huh? Looks like yer got yer feet twisted in yer spider's web after all." But the Ferret, pulling a wry face, deigned no reply.

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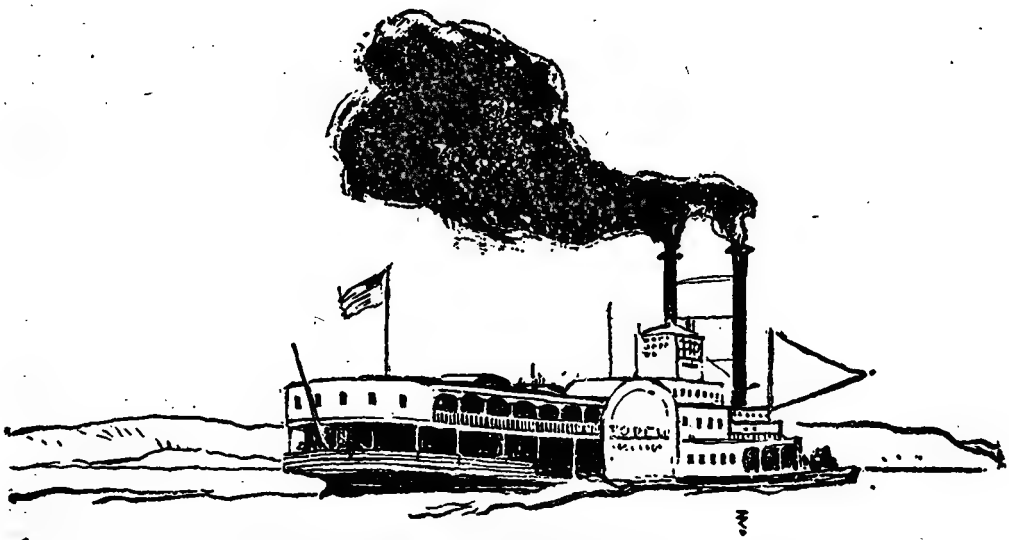

THE MAN WHO REFUSED TO FORGET

by

JOSEPH MILLS HANSON*

IT WAS half-past four o'clock on a sweltering midsummer afternoon in the early '50s, and on the St. Louis levee the daily convulsion of fevered activity incidental to "steamboat time" was at its full height.

Over the rough cobblestones of its long, sloping expanse, great drays bumped and rattled; from the busy stores fronting the river, crowds of belated passengers, laden with satchels, bundles and protesting children, streamed down toward the boat-landings, while about the huge piles of merchandise heaped near the water's edge sweating negro roustabouts toiled frantically under the profane directions of steamboat mates whose voices seemed keyed to no tone more soothing than a bellow.

As far as the eye could see up and down river the shore was lined with steamers, their wooden hulls and upper works gleaming dazzling white in the hot afternoon sunshine, their tall stacks vomiting volumes of black smoke heavenward, and their deep-tongued bells tolling ominous warning to the tardy that the time for departure was drawing near.

In such a busy throng there seemed little room for idlers, but, leaning back against a pile of cotton bales in the very center of the turmoil, there stood one individual who was obviously doing nothing more than looking on. He was a tall man with mighty shoulders, the deeply bronzed skin of whose face could not conceal a sickly pallor beneath, such as is bred of long confinement indoors. The reason for his idleness appeared in the fact that one of his legs was gone at the knee, while his awkwardness in handling his crutches seemed to indicate that he had not been long out of hospital. He appeared so far lost in gloomy thought as to be oblivious to his surroundings, but presently he started from his reverie and removed the short corn-cob pipe from his lips as a young man suddenly stepped out

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of the hurrying crowd and accosted him.

"Are you a river man, sir?" inquired the newcomer in a gentle voice, marked by a decided Southern drawl.

"Used to be," replied the other, tapping his stump of a leg significantly.

"I reckon you never happened to hear of a steamboat man around here by the name of Sam Ryerton?"

The cripple started violently and surveyed his questioner with keen interest.

"I'm infernally sorry to have to state, stranger," he answered, "that you reckon incorrect. Up till four months ago I was mate on 'Flop-Eared Sam' Ryerton's boat, the *Tupelo*."

The young man was evidently as much startled by the answer as the other had been by the question, but he concealed all except his first flash of surprise.

"Well, that's odd, isn't it?" he remarked, simply. "Have you quit him?"

"Quit him? I look it, don't I? Flop-Eared Sam keeps his boat like a hog-pen; everything old and rotten. One of the tackle-ropes broke and dropped a hemp bale down on my leg. That's how I quit."

The other seemed to be thinking fast. But he only answered, sympathetically:

"By garry, that's mighty hard luck!" After a pause, he went on, "Do you happen to know whether this Ryerton ever ran the Yazoo?"

"I've heard so, six or eight years back. They say he left there sudden, though; why, I don't know, but I'll bet there was something devilish back of it."

The young man compressed his lips and his nostrils quivered.

"Why do you think so?" he asked.

"Because he's a —— brute!" burst out the other, in a sudden transport of rage. "He's a bully and a coward and a skinflint. He underpays his crew and can't get any half the time, and he kills or cripples 'em when he can. He treats his passengers so outrageous nobody'll travel with him that can help it; that's why he's running in the Omaha trade now, with emigrants for the California Trail. Them poor devils go with him because his boat's cheap, and they take his abuse for fear of bein' dumped ashore."

"Is the *Tupelo* in port now?" asked the other, ignoring the outburst.

"That's her," said the ex-mate, pointing with his crutch at a small steamer not far distant up the shore. "She leaves for Omaha at five."

"I wonder if she needs a clerk?"

"Most likely; usually does. Why?"

"Well, I'm hunting for a job."

The cripple looked at him in amazement, inspecting him from head to foot. The youth was not, to put it leniently, of an ideal physical type. His figure was tall and lean, with angular joints and a narrow chest, while his cheeks were sallow and high-boned, his hair and eyebrows pale yellow, and his lips thin and pursed. The only prepossessing elements about him were his gentle voice and his steady, hazel eyes, which seemed capable of a remarkably alert vision without giving an impression of craftiness. In spite of himself, the river man grinned.

"My boy," said he, kindly, "you don't want to get on Flop-Eared Sam's portage-book. He'd eat you some morning for breakfast."

"Maybe not, if he finds I'll be indigestible," replied the other, smiling also.

He started away, then turned back.

"Are you going on the river again?" he inquired.

"Well, I should say—if I can after I get the hang of these sticks, though there ain't much demand for one-legg'd mates." Then he added, more hopefully, "But my voice is as good as ever and I can bust a barrelhead with one fist."

The young man extended his bony hand and grasped that of the ex-mate in a hearty grip. "Keep your nerve," he said earnestly. "I'm sure you'll get a good berth before long."

Then he walked rapidly away up the levee.

DODGING his way through the hurrying crowd, he stood in a moment at the foot of the *Tupelo's* landing-stage. As he approached, he could hear, even above the babel of other noises, the hiss of steam escaping from her ill-packed engines. A nearer inspection confirmed this evidence of her general decrepitude. She was a small side-wheeler, of the class known on the Missouri as "tramps." The white paint had peeled in patches from her hull and upper works, her boats hung awry from the davits and even her rusty smoke-stacks were out of plumb, some of their stay-wires sag-

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ging loose and others stretched as tight as violin strings. Yet the *Tupelo* was not an old boat; she was merely a mistreated one, and like a woman, for all boats are feminine in spirit, under such conditions she had early lost her buoyancy and beauty. On the bank beside her lay what still remained unloaded of a cargo quite different in character from those which were going aboard her more prosperous sisters.

They were taking on brilliantly painted caravans of new farming implements, bales of dry-goods, boxes and crates of groceries. But the *Tupelo* was receiving chiefly old trunks and chests, rolls of bedding, strings of cooking utensils and other paraphernalia such as is associated with emigrants in all times and climes. Clustered along the guards of the boat or about the heaps of household goods were the women and children of the emigrants; gaunt, toil-hardened and unlovely most of them, though here and there shone out a buxom face.

There were few negro deck-hands about; the male passengers, long-bearded and roughly dressed, were carrying their own possessions on board and stowing them away along the sides of the main deck, flanking the boilers. It was plain that the company was recruited chiefly from the ranks of the unsuccessful, hopeful now only of finding a kindlier fate in new, far-distant lands.

As the newcomer stepped on the landing-stage, he heard a voice, heavy and menacing, roar out from somewhere in the interior of the vessel:

"Pile that junk higher against the stanchions, you fools! Jerk it on quick, now! This boat ain't goin' to lay here till sundown waitin' for your infernal rubbish!"

The visitor walked up the plank and accosted one of the emigrants, a broad-shouldered young fellow with fiery red hair.

"Is Captain Ryerton about?" he asked.

"Sure, an' can't ye hear the ould hippopotymus a-blowin'? Follow the sound o' the guns, me b'y, an' may the Lord have mercy on yer sowl!"

The visitor did as instructed. Stepping around the foot of the boiler-deck stairs, he suddenly found himself face to face with a man whose appearance would have been enough to arouse attention, not to say apprehension, in any surroundings. As they encountered each other, the right fist of this man was raised in the act of emphasizing some profane injunction to one of his intimidated passengers.

He was a giant, fully six feet and four inches tall and somewhat too heavy for his height, though his chest and muscles were Herculean. The sprinkling of gray in his hair and long, tangled beard marked him as past middle age, but his face was florid, with bushy brows and eyes that glowed balefully beneath them, while the tops of his heavy ears, hanging pendulous from sheer weight, lent a peculiarly brutish aspect to his countenance. Everything in his appearance indicated that he was the prey of a temper always ungoverned and now ungovernable.

"Is this Captain Ryerton?" inquired the young man politely of this apparition.

The latter glared at him for a moment. His upraised fist did not at once descend.

"Who are you?" he finally demanded, in a tone indicating that he regarded the mere presence of the other as a personal affront.

"My name is John Reed. I understand you're looking for a clerk. I should like to get the position."

HE EYED the Captain calmly as the latter looked him over with a sneering grin. Presently Ryerton threw back his head and gave vent to a deep roar of laughter. When his amusement had somewhat subsided, he remarked:

"Yes, I'm lookin' for a man; but I'm lookin' for one that can *work*, not for a narrow-chested, lantern-jawed dyspeptic."

Reed betrayed no resentment.

"I'm not applying for a position as deck-hand, Captain," he replied. "Do you want a clerk to keep books or to wrestle cargo?"

The Captain seemed somewhat impressed by this logical retort, though his manner lost none of its brutality.

"I want a fellow that can keep his condemned tongue from clattering, and take orders. You river clerks have got too much lip. If I take you, you may as well understand that I'm boss on this boat; I pay your wages and you mind your business, that's all."

Reed suddenly looked Ryerton full in his savage eyes.

"You'll pay the wages and that'll be all, Captain," he said quietly. Then he added, indifferently, "What's your regular rate?"

Ryerton named a sum nearly fifty per

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cent. under the wages paid to clerks on other boats. Without demur, Reed accepted it. The Captain looked at him curiously. He had expected to be forced at least nearly to the prevailing figure. Not many men were driven so low as to seek employment from him, and when they did they usually insisted on at least fair wages. He often went without a clerk, but he knew that he lost money by doing so.

"Haven't you been workin' lately?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. But I need this job. Shall I go to the office?"

"Don't get in a hurry; wait till we start and I'll show you. Now clear out o' the way!"

Reed turned toward the rail when Ryerton, looking after him suspiciously, called out: "Say, where do you come from?"

"Kentucky."

"Ever steamboated down the Mississippi?"

"No."

The Captain still seemed unsatisfied.

"Nor on the Yazoo?"

"Never."

"Oh, well, I thought maybe I'd seen you somewheres."

Without answering, Reed turned again and walked to the rail overlooking the levee, while the Captain resumed the browbeating of his victims, the emigrants.

II

AT FIVE o'clock promptly, in accordance with time-honored custom, the boats got away, leaving the levee in a final convulsion of activity. Up through Sawyer Bend swept the northbound fleet, some for the Illinois River, some for the Missouri, others for points on the upper Mississippi even as far as St. Paul.

The *Tupelo* was with them at the start, like a drab Canada drake among a flock of white swans, but her wheezing engines could not keep their pace and she was far in the rear when the fleet straightened out into line to pass through the narrow channel at Chain of Rocks, while the sunset was already red in the west when she finally rounded the low willow banks below Mobile Point and plunged her bow into the murky waters of the Missouri.

Since she had backed out of the levee Reed had scarcely had time to glance up from his work in the narrow little office at the forward end of the saloon. Captain Ryerton had taken him there immediately after they got under way, and left him to straighten out the seemingly hopeless confusion of disordered papers and dog-eared, ink-stained books. But he worked skilfully and silently and was fast getting his passenger and cargo lists into legible form when he was interrupted by a great hand reaching over the desk, which slapped him so resounding a blow on the back that he coughed violently. A voice, deep and hearty, cried:

"Hello, Reed Stilton! What the blazes are you playing clerk for, and way up here?"

The clerk sprang to his feet and shot a lightning glance along the length of the saloon. Ryerton was not there. Then he leaned over the desk.

"Confound you, Tom Wood, are you piloting?" he exclaimed in a low tone. "See here, my name's not Stilton; it's Reed; John Reed!"

The jaw of the other slowly dropped, then closed again as he threw back his head in a laugh.

"What's the matter, Reed?" he cried. "Too slick with the cards on the Vicksburg packets? I never thought you'd get run off!"

"That's my business, Tom. But, this trip, my name's John Reed."

"Oh, Hades! Why should I——"

The eyes of the clerk flashed.

"Do you remember two years ago, on the *Belle Natchez*, when you had fifteen hundred dollars on the table and Louis Marcel held the cards, and then *I* dealt you a hand?"

Wood's face cleared.

"Oh, well, then," he said, "your name's Reed. But what's the game?"

"That's my business, too. Wait."

"All right, Mr. *Reed*. Only don't clean out any of these poor, God-forsaken emigrants."

"Did you ever know me to turn a trick on a man that's down? They're not in the game. Now, good night, Tom; go eat your supper. I'm busy."

The *Tupelo* was not a good way-landing money-maker. She was too badly run down for business people to hold her safe, and she always took a round two weeks for the run

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to Omaha. Nor was Captain Ryerton a man to attract the good will of shippers. Consequently she carried little freight for the small agricultural towns and country stores along the river and, after once getting his books in order, her new clerk had plenty of time on his hands for studying the vessel and her patrons and observing the peculiar methods of Captain Ryerton in dealing with the latter.

The emigrants were nearly all deck passengers, part of whom, goaded by Ryerton's swaggering abuse, were constantly in a state of abject fear, while the remainder were as constantly in sullen but silent rebellion. Once or twice during the first days out, some individual, more spirited than the rest, undertook resistance. Their experience discouraged others from following their example, for one man was thrown bodily out on a sand-bar, his trunk after him, while another, with his wife and two children and their household goods, was set ashore in a forest, ten miles from the nearest town!

WITH the exception of these episodes the voyage proved monotonous enough until one afternoon about four days out, when the *Tupelo* stopped at a country landing to put off one of her few consignments of freight. Reed, as he chose to be known, was standing on the bank checking the goods as the negro deck-hands carried them ashore, when he heard the voice of Ryerton, who, in the absence of a mate, was superintending the roustabouts, upraised furiously on the deck.

"Get out o' the way, you carrot-headed mick! What're you blockin' up the gang-plank for? I'll throw you ashore if you don't keep out o' the road!"

"Ah, now, but you won't, Captain. Oi'm not on yer rotten gang-plank and, faith, the place Oi am on Oi've paid fur."

Reed recognized the voice as that of the young Irishman he had first encountered on boarding the *Tupelo*. He moved a few steps nearer. The Captain's face was turning purple.

"An infernal lot you've paid, you Dublin donkey!" he cried. "Keep your tongue or I'll drown you!"

"In filthy wurruds, maybe, but not in wather."

Ryerton drew back his fist, which would have hurled the Irish lad against the stanchions, but Reed stepped up beside him.

"I don't think Farley was in the way of the deck-hands, Captain," he said quietly.

His employer's wrath turned upon him.

"What business you got to think, you whistle-lunged consumptive? Get back there and mind your business or you'll go ashore, too!"

A titter rippled among the emigrant women gathered near. Even the men grinned, while the negroes, pausing in their work, laughed outright. Remembrance of personal injuries could not chill their merriment at seeing the lank clerk with his treble voice thus crushed by the Captain. Weakness, however involuntary, seems made only for contempt. But before Reed, his long face unruffled by either the threat or the ridicule, could say more, another actor came upon the scene.

"Oh, come, Ryerton," cried a jocular voice above them, "leave somebody on the boat! Erin-go-braugh wasn't on the gang-plank."

Every one looked upward to see Wood, the pilot, leaning carelessly over the rail of the boiler-deck above. The Captain glared at him. His anger had the better of his judgment.

"If you know what's good for you, you'll keep out o' this"! he shouted.

"Oh, go to ——!" replied the pilot, smiling pleasantly, as he cut off a slice of tobacco and thrust it in his cheek. "I'll leave your mud-scow stickin' up on a sand-bar if you talk to me that way. I'm just tellin' you what I seen."

Ryerton knew well enough that the pilot could make good his threat; a pilot was not one to be trifled with. So he turned again to Farley.

"On or off the gang-plank, you'll stay off now," he cried. "Get back!"

"Bein' as it's just as convenient for me, Oi will," replied Farley discreetly, glancing at the other's gigantic shoulders. "But the gang-plank's poorer by the exchange."

He walked away and Reed, also, without further words, resumed his place on the bank. He was in no hurry to precipitate a crisis with the Captain. Indeed, he now somewhat doubted his wisdom in entering the late controversy at all, but he had done it because he liked Farley. After the *Tupelo* was under way again he took occasion casually to encounter the latter.

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"Are you married?" he asked, abruptly.

"What d'yeh think?" inquired the Irishman, looking him over quizzically but not unkindly.

"You're not."

"An' why, then?"

"You'd not have dared the Captain if you were."

"Divil a bit am Oi! Sure, Oi want a place to put her in first, where she won't be afther runnin' acrost the loikes ave *him*." He jerked his thumb in the direction from which Ryerton's voice was proceeding. "But it's thrue there's a lass back in ould Connaught thot moight not feel dishgraced to bear the name o' Farley. Thot's why Oi'm goin' to thry Californy."

"What are you doing with yourself this evening, Farley?"

"Not a thing but sthare at thim hills on the roight an' thim flats on the lift an' listhen to the babies squall. Sure, it lacks excoitment."

"Ever play cards?"

"Oi have been known."

"Poker?"

"Poke—who?"

"Draw poker; it's a card game."

"Sure, Oi thought Oi knew all the thranslations o' the Ould One's boible, but thot's a new language to me."

"Well, come on up to my cabin and I'll show you. It's better than sitting here on a reel of rope."

III

THE clerk's quarters, which were located, as usual, in the texas, up under the pilot-house, were exceedingly narrow and small. Therefore, the late afternoon sun being sultry, it was not unnatural that he and his visitor should seat themselves on the deck just outside the cabin door, where the roof of the texas cast a narrow belt of shade.

Here for a half-hour, Reed engaged himself in explaining to his guest the intricacies of the game, while the gnats, encouraged by the quiet air, buzzed unheeded about their heads and the steam-pipe above them puffed its monotonous song as the *Tupelo* slowly forged on between the low, green willow banks of the Missouri. Then they began to play for money, with a very low limit, using bits of torn paper in lieu of chips. They had not been at it long when Wood, who was off duty, appeared in the doorway of his cabin, heavy-eyed with the sleep from which he had just arisen. But his eyes opened when he noticed what was going on and who was the clerk's companion.

"Here, now, *Mister* Reed," he exclaimed, angrily, "I thought you weren't goin' to do that."

"I'm not, Wood," replied the other, without glancing up. "Won't you come in?"

"What kind of a greenhorn do you take me for?"

"It's straight poker, the limit's five cents and it isn't going up," said Reed, calmly discarding three cards and drawing.

Wood stared at him. If Farley was a victim, he was certainly a poor selection; the evidences of poverty were all over him. From his seat on the floor, Reed looked up into the pilot's eyes. The latter hesitated a moment, then exclaimed, emphatically:

"By jiminy, I will! I want to see this game clear through," and he squatted beside them.

The play went on monotonously enough; fortune seemed quite impartial in her favors. Now and then Wood yawned. Even Farley, to whom the game was a novelty, began to lose interest.

"It's a merry-go-round, it is," he exclaimed. "The coin of ivery wan of us is glued to the flure foreninst."

A hand had just been dealt when a heavy footstep was heard ascending the stairs from the deck below.

"Flop-Eared Sam!" exclaimed Wood, involuntarily lowering his hand.

Reed made no such movement, but thoughtfully examined his cards. The pilot recovered himself and laughed softly.

"He'll raise the devil!" he remarked.

"Oh, I reckon not," said the clerk. "Farley, I'll see you."

He pushed one of the bits of paper out on the floor.

The hairy face of Ryerton appeared above the companionway. He no sooner saw the players than he came toward them, his pace and evidently his anger increasing as he detected their occupation.

"What are you doing here, loafing and gambling on my boat?" he cried as he reached them. "Do you think I'm paying you for this sort of thing, Reed?"

"You're paying me for nothing else when there's nothing else to do, Captain," an-

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swered the clerk without temper. "Come, you know that's a fact. Won't you join us?"

Wood choked back a gasp of astonishment at the speaker's audacity but Ryerton only gave a sneering laugh as he looked at the bits of paper.

"Do you think I play penny-ante with kids and beggarly emigrants? When I play cards it's got to be worth while and I want men to play with!"

Nevertheless, he covetously eyed the few dollars in small change on the floor and shot a covert but comprehending glance at Wood's exposed hand.

"Well, Captain, I've never seen much high play myself," said Reed, "but we might raise the limit some to accommodate you; I've got some more money here."

He produced a slender roll of bills, perhaps one hundred and fifty dollars, at sight of which Farley's eyes widened, while Ryerton's narrowed. The latter restrained himself by an obvious effort.

"No, Reed," he said, in a tone much less gruff than customary, "No, I can't stop now. We're comin' into Glasgow soon. But maybe some other time." He started away, then stopped and looked back. "I haven't played in a good while," he said, in as nearly an apologetic manner as he could command, "but I might try it again."

Then he walked away toward the bow.

Farley had laid down his cards and now arose.

"Where you goin'?" cried Wood.

"Faith, Oi didn't know Oï was playin' ag'in the United Sthates mint," said the emigrant. "You'll be afther havin' all my few dollars."

He looked reproachfully at Reed. The latter, as well as Wood, laughed outright at the honest fellow's conception of boundless wealth. But the clerk arose and laid his hand on the Irishman's shoulder.

"Get out!" he said kindly. "We're not going to break you; I couldn't if I would—don't know enough about the game. But if you want to quit, let's divide up." He leaned down again and counted the little paper squares. "Here, Farley, you quit winner ninety-five cents."

He handed over the money and the Irishman took his way down-stairs, his face puzzled. Wood arose and gazed searchingly at the clerk, who returned the look inscrutably.

"Reed Stilton," said the pilot, in a low tone, "I'm beginning to see your drift. I don't know what you've got against Flop-Eared Sam, but, anyhow, he needs a crimp. You can count on me."

He extended his hand, which the other took.

"Whatever you're driving at, Tom," said Reed, "is more than I know. But, just the same, I'm much obliged for your good-will."

Wood's face became quizzical. "Won't talk even yet, eh?" he said. "Oh, well, all right; but count on me, anyhow."

SOME time later there came a windy night with a clouded sky and the *Tupelo* tied to the bank to wait for daybreak. After the passengers had quieted down below decks, Captain Ryerton, Wood and his partner pilot, and the clerk, sat down to a card game in the main cabin. When they arose, several hours later, Ryerton had something over fifty dollars of Reed's roll of bills in his pocket and his appetite was keenly whetted for more. The two pilots had played about even. The game was becoming interesting. Next day Reed stepped into the pilot-house and inquired casually of Wood, who was at the wheel:

"Tom, what happens when he gets to Omaha?"

"Who, Ryerton? He goes on a spree."

"Not till then?"

"Oh, he generally begins bowling up some a few hours out; not much, but enough to get a little meaner'n usual."

"When'll we get to Omaha?"

"Well, if we keep on chuckin' her along this way, about to-morrow afternoon."

"Can't you fix it to hold her out overnight—so we have to go to the bank just below Omaha?"

"That's easy enough, but I want to get there."

"It might pay you just as well not to, Tom."

There was a silence. Wood swung the bow into a long crossing, set the wheel and then turned and examined through the rear windows the stern marks on the distant shore.

"Well, Reed," he said at length, "I don't care much; I'm not after a record on this old tub, anyhow. We'll call it day after to-morrow morning."

Hours later in the day, Wood being at

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the wheel, the timbers of the *Tupelo* creaked from bow to stern as her flat bottom grated its length on a shoal-bar. She came to a stop. Captain Ryerton stormed and cursed, but it did no good. Seven hours were consumed in sparring her over the bar and the delay did not increase the Captain's good humor.

After she was off again, he profanely urged haste and apparently it was made. Nevertheless, the next day's twilight found her below the mouth of Mosquito Creek, more than fifteen miles from Omaha. Wood took her to the bank, informing the Captain that he would not attempt the passage of a certain nest of snags above until he had daylight to run by. Ryerton's protests, indeed, were but feeble, for there had been no time for poker the night before and Reed's remaining one hundred dollars were still in his possession. After supper the Captain himself proposed a game. Reed seemed reluctant.

"I'm tired, Captain," he explained. "Didn't sleep much last night. I think I better turn in."

"What's the matter?" sneered Ryerton. "Afraid of losing more money? Blazes, man, the luck'll probably change to-night."

That he had begun drinking secretly during the afternoon, Reed could detect by the glitter of reckless avarice in his eyes.

"Yes, the luck might change," agreed the clerk hesitatingly.

"Anyhow, I can't break you, Reed," pursued the tempter, in honeyed tones. "You play a mighty good, cautious game. I don't often play myself, but when I do, I like to play with somebody that knows how."

He was careful not to smile.

Wood, who was with them, directly joined his solicitations to those of the Captain. "Oh, come on, Reed," he urged. "There's nothing else to do to-night. It won't be very high and we'll quit early if you say."

"Well, I'm not used to losing much sleep; can't stand it," piped Reed. "But if you're bound to have it so, I'll stay with you a while."

"That's the stuff!" cried Ryerton. "Come on, we'll sit in here away from the mosquitoes. Lord, that slough's rightly named!" He jerked his thumb in the direction of the river-bank, where Mosquito Creek crept sluggishly through the darkness. Indeed, the air was thick with the troublesome insects. "Where's Bushnell?" he asked. Bushnell was the other pilot.

"I'll get him," said Wood, starting out.

"Get Farley, while you're about it," called Reed after him.

"What do you want with that thick-pated Irishman?" growled Ryerton, seating himself and beginning to shuffle the cards. "He'll only be in the way."

"Well, he might like to watch the game, even if he don't play," replied Reed with a manner of quiet finality which the Captain did not care to oppose lest his victim should retire from the game.

Shortly the five were seated around one of the square, cabin dining-tables, Farley at the clerk's elbow.

"Comfortable, Farley?" inquired Reed solicitously.

"Sure, more than if Oi was closer to the table."

"Oh, play the game, hang it!" exclaimed Ryerton, fingering his cards. "He'll take care of himself!"

IV

THE play began quietly enough. For some time they gave and took, no one showing much gain, though Ryerton gradually crept ahead. Above them the dim coal-oil hanging-lamp smoked its chimney to a yet fainter radiance and about the heads of each absorbed player buzzed a halo of mosquitoes, at which he now and then slapped with a half-unconscious hand. The sultry heat of the Summer night seemed to increase. They were all in shirt-sleeves, but Ryerton presently threw off his vest also, and the rest, except Reed, followed his example.

Since the first modest game between Farley and Reed on the texas deck, Ryerton had provided chips. Now, after an hour's play, a fair-sized pile of them lay at his own right hand. He judged that he had already won about half of Reed's money. The lust of the gambler began to grip him more tightly. But as his excitement rose, so did his thirst. He reached into his hip pocket and produced a flask, from which he took a deep draught, then extended it toward Reed. The latter shook his head.

"Don't drink," he said shortly.

Ryerton's lip curled. "The —— you don't, you——"

But he checked the sneer; that wouldn't

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do yet, not till he actually had the money.

He handed the flask to the pilots, who sipped gingerly. But he knew the pilots; they would not let themselves be fleeced. The game went on. Presently the limit was raised and, very shortly after, Reed's last chip went out on the table! The Captain took another pull at his flask, showed his hand and triumphantly swept in the pile.

"Reckon you're about done, ain't you, hatchet-face?" he cried.

"I have a little more here," observed Reed in a soft voice, reaching into his pocket and producing another roll of bills. "More chips, please!"

He smiled pensively at Bushnell, the banker.

The Captain swallowed hard as he devoured the fresh money with his eyes.

"Howly saints!" muttered Farley.

There were at least two hundred dollars still in Reed's possession; that he could easily see.

Wood shaded his eyes with his hand. He did not want Ryerton to see how hugely he was enjoying this.

"Excuse me, Mr. Reed," faltered the Captain lamely. "I didn't know you had more money. We can go on."

"Thank you for your courtesy, Captain. Yes, we can go on a little longer."

The game proceeded. Ryerton's pile of chips continued to grow. But presently there came a pause. For some reason fortune seemed to waver, the Captain made no more headway. A fraction of his gains even dribbled back to Reed, though the pledges in front of him still amounted to about three hundred dollars of Reed's money and a hundred or so of the other players'. As the pause came, he grew more and more agitated, his avaricious desire to possess the wealth which still lay beyond his reach increasing until he was ready to go to any length to obtain it.

What time it was no one knew, but the damp chill in the air indicated that morning could not be far away. Off somewhere in the darkness across the river-bottoms a rooster crowed. The sound was so far away that it quavered in the hushed air. The deal came around to Reed. He picked up the pack, then paused and looked up at the sickly lamp. The others followed his glance.

"Can't you clean that chimney, Farley?" he asked. "It's so dark I can hardly see."

The Irishman arose, took off the chimney and wiped it. Not till he had finished did Reed shuffle and deal out the cards, carelessly. As he picked up his, Captain Ryerton's eyes remained glued to them an instant and his nostrils widened. In the same instant Reed shot a lightning glance at Wood. The Captain's face resumed its studied calm. Bushnell tossed down his hand and tilted back in his chair.

"How many?" asked Reed.

"Pass," replied Bushnell, yawning.

"Pat," said the Captain.

"Two," Wood murmured.

"I take one," announced the clerk, and silence fell.

Wood bet high and held on through a couple of raises. But when it came his turn again he laid down his cards.

"This is getting too rich for me," he declared.

In spite of himself, his voice shook a little. Then he leaned his elbows on the table, his muscles tense.

The Captain made a forbidding raise. Reed had barely enough in sight to cover it and add a little more. But the Captain was not through.

"I see you and raise you a hundred. How now, little one?" and he laughed viciously.

Reed slipped his hand inside the breast of his shirt and brought out several bills.

"Five hundred on top of that, Captain!" he said, laying down the money.

THE front legs of Bushnell's chair came down with a thump and Farley almost ceased breathing. Ryerton's eyes bulged. He swallowed hard again, looked at his cards, then at his chips. He had not half enough to cover the raise. Then he felt in his pocket and brought forth sufficient bills to make the pile three hundred dollars larger. Reed glanced at him keenly.

Under his matted hair the sweat was beginning to show on the Captain's brow. He answered Reed's look with one of sickly fascination. Without once taking his eyes from the Captain's face, Reed again put his hand inside the breast of his shirt. Slowly he drew it out; it was wadded with bills!

"Count them," he said to Bushnell. "Captain Ryerton, I see you and raise you ten thousand dollars!"

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Ryerton lurched back as if he had been struck in the face. He caught at his throat with a shaking hand while the beads of sweat began to course down his cheeks into his beard.

"Good God, man——!" he cried hoarsely, "I ain't got that much money in the world!"

"Very well," answered the clerk mercilessly, "let it go, then. You've only about twelve hundred dollars on the table." He paused, then added, "And I have eleven thousand."

"Eleven thousand!" gasped the Captain.

He leaned over and looked at the fortune within reach of his hand. Then he looked again at his cards. If they were good, he might sweep it all in. If!

"I've got this boat—the *Tupelo*," he whispered.

"*Her?* The *Tupelo* isn't worth five thousand!"

"She's worth twelve, but I'll put her up."

Reed appeared to consider.

"Oh, very well," he said at length. "I'll take the chance. Gentlemen, you are witnesses. Now, Captain, are you all done?"

"All done," breathed Ryerton.

"Then show down."

With shaking fingers the Captain spread his cards on the table and leaned back, his eyes wide and one clenched fist pressed against his breast. Before him lay four kings and a seven of clubs. Reed bent forward and scanned the cards. Then, with a quick, smooth gesture, he spread his own hand beside them. It was a straight flush of diamonds, queen high!

For a second the buzz of the myriad mosquitoes throbbed on every ear like the beating of drums. The blood slowly trickled from Ryerton's florid face and a film seemed to draw over his eyes. Then, with a motion incredibly quick for his huge body, he suddenly lunged forward across the table, a dirk-knife glittering in his outstretched hand. So swiftly was it done that the point of the knife slit Reed's vest before he could spring back. But the Captain did not reach quite far enough, for, as he struck, his forehead came hard against the muzzle of a pistol and Farley's voice shouted:

"Stop, or you're a dead wan! You murtherin' beast, I'll blow ye to purgatory!"

A second later Wood and Bushnell grasped the maddened man's arms and threw him back in his chair. But there was no need of violence; he had gone limp as a rag. His hands dropped over the sides of his chair and his head sunk on his breast.

"Good ——!" he gasped, "I'm ruined, ruined!"

V

ON THE other side of the table, the clerk stood gazing fixedly at the collapsed frame of the giant. There was nothing in his face to indicate exultation, but there was cold sternness in his eyes, and under his sallow cheeks glowed an unwonted flush. One of his hands idly stirred among the heap of bills and coins on the table. At length he glanced around at the three silent men who stood beside him and began to speak, his voice low and even.

"Boys," he said, "I want you to listen to something. Seven years ago this man, Sam Ryerton, was running a boat down on the Yazoo. He wasn't quite as savage a brute then as he is now, and he got friendly with a planter living on the river whose only fault was that he had a weakness for gambling. Ryerton kept working him along until finally one night he induced him to drink some, got him into a card game and finished by fleecing him out of his last dollar in cash and out of a deed to his plantation. The planter got up from the table, went out in the street and shot himself through the head, leaving a penniless widow and a sickly, half-grown son behind him. The next night Ryerton skipped the country, because men who had seen the game knew that he had used marked cards. He skipped to save himself from being ridden out on a rail, or maybe strung up!"

Suddenly the speaker strode around the table, pushed back the Captain's limp head and, glaring into his eyes, demanded:

"Isn't that true, Sam Ryerton? Isn't it true?"

The other choked and then whispered in a voice hardly audible:

"Yes!"

The clerk stepped back again.

"That sickly, half-grown boy," he went on, "had to support his mother. He took to the river and after a while became a gambler—and a pretty unscrupulous, low-down one. But two things he never did—he never fleeced a man who couldn't afford it so far as he could know, and he never drove any man to the last ditch. He hated

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his profession, but he stayed in it to make a living until he could get back what belonged to him from his father's murderer, when the chance came, with the murderer's own weapons!

"He saved some money for the purpose and one day he made a big clean-up out of a party of blooded Englishmen. Right then he started after his enemy and—well, gentlemen, he's got him. Sam Ryerton, I'm the son of the man you drove to suicide. My name is Reed Stilton!"

A shudder shook the Captain's body. He jerked back his head and fixed his eyes on the other in horrified amazement.

"Stilton!" he gasped. "Good ——, man, I didn't mean to kill—to drive him to it! Have mercy!"

"Did you have mercy? No, you slimy, venomous swamp-snake! But I'll have more mercy than you did. I've won back from you now enough to make up for part of what you robbed my father of; I've beaten you at the same game you used on him. Here's what you will do: To-morrow when my boat, this boat *Tupelo* here, reaches Omaha, you'll get off her and go with these emigrants to California. And you'll go with them, too; you won't sneak out of it, because my friend Farley here is going to keep watch on you. And if you try any foolishness before or after you start, he is going to tell the rest of the emigrant party the story I've just told him. And you know that after the way you've treated them it would take a whole lot less than that to make them leave your bones with those of the buffalo alongside the Mormon Trail. Isn't that so, Farley?"

"Be the saints, it is thot!" cried the Irishman. "It's me thot's thinkin' he should be sint to roost wid the crows, annyhow."

"Not yet, Farley, give him a chance. Now, Captain, here's five hundred dollars to start you on; I'll not treat you as you would me."

He counted out the bills and thrust them into Ryerton's limp hand. Then he counted five hundred dollars more and handed them to Farley.

"Here's just a little to show my gratitude for the way you've stood by me," he said. "Now, now, it's all right; it'll help bring over the little lass from old Connaught!"

He cashed the chips of Wood and Bushnell, crammed the rest of the money into his own pockets and then, sweeping up the cards scattered over the table, stepped to the door and hurled them over the rail into the river.

"Boys," said he, facing them again, "that's the last game for money I will ever play! They'd laugh to hear that on the Vicksburg packets, but it's true. I learned to gamble so that I could play this game and I've played it and won it and now I'm done. If you fellows can take a lesson, it's the last you'll play, too. It does nothing but sear a man's soul and make him a brute, or else ruin him and perhaps kill him. God Almighty hasn't given us enough time in this world for us to spend it trying to swindle each other!"

He turned again to the door. Across the bottoms the patches of night fog were beginning to show gray under the coming light of dawn.

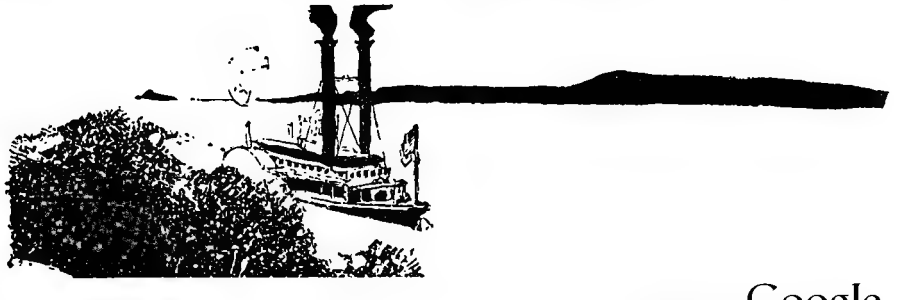
"Tom, how soon can you put us into Omaha?"

"By nine o'clock—Captain," answered Wood, smiling as he bestowed the title.

"Good. We can get the passengers all off and start back by mid-afternoon."

"There ought to be a mate to boss the unloading of all that baggage."

"The mate of the *Tupelo*, Tom," said Stilton, "is back in St. Louis. He'll be on her next trip, after she's fixed up and running, as she ought to be, in the first-class trade. He's only got one leg, but his voice is as good as ever and he can bust a barrelhead with one fist!"



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The TEAR OF BUDDHA

BY FRANK LOVELL NELSON*

CHAPTER I

A VISION OUT OF THE PAST

YOU see such nights nowhere but on the Indian Ocean. There is a wonderful sunset in Tibet, after you get over the icy hogback of the Himalayas on to the plateau; but for sheer riot of color it can not compare to the gamut of transformation from golden orange to gory crimson that is staged on the steamer lane to the Orient through the Arabian Sea.

I lingered at the forward rail of the P. & O. liner *Mongolia*, homeward bound, until the last remnant of crimson had faded before the rising moon and the ship plowed through an ocean of heaving quicksilver.

My mind was busy with a problem. Problems and solitude were good for me. I had gone roving in middle age to forget, to reconstruct and, in a measure, to begin life all over again. The problem was: What has become of Carlton Clarke? Where was that master mind, that loyal soul, that keen eyed, quick-witted man who had led me deep into the mesh of mystery, the pursuit of the human animal, beside which all other sport pales, and then vanished.

Ten years before we had clasped hands in a mountain pass well up toward the sacred Lake Mansarowar and the holy mountain Rakstal. We had loved the same woman. I had been preferred. I had won her. That was our story. He set his face toward Lhasa, the lodestone of the centuries.

The woman and I, for we were all together at the parting, turned toward the lights of Broadway, the warm red glow of a fireside on Long Island, toward all the component parts of that word home. Now that death had leveled the odds between us, would he return? Was he living? This was the problem.

It had been with me on the rapid whirl across India by the luxurious Bombay Express. As I watched the white swirl of foam, brilliantly phosphorescent, that I had last watched with the woman on my arm, the problem became vivid. But this is not the story of the woman.

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GRADUALLY I became conscious of a pair of eyes burning twin holes in my brain through the back of my head. I turned suddenly. The only person on that part of the promenade deck aside from myself was a Buddhist monk. I had seen the fellow when we shipped at the Carnac Bunder and, later, in the afternoons beneath the awnings. I merely remember wondering how he had been able to break over the inflexible rules of caste and travel in the first saloon.

I started to brush past him, but he stood in the way, his arms folded in his white linen tunic, his eyes glowing like twin coals in his turbaned head. Placing a finger on his lips to caution silence, he whispered:

"It is not in the memories of the past that one finds the lotus, O seeker for the secret of Gautama!"

The face! The eyes! But no, it could not be. Memory and the magic of the night were playing me a trick.

"Life is a wheel," continued the native, "and he who is dissatisfied with it has but to await the turning."

"Who are you," I gasped, "to read my thoughts?"

"Well, Sexton, don't you know me?" came the voice stripped of its native lisp.

"My God! Carlton Clarke!" I almost shouted.

"Not so loud," he whispered, drawing me into the shadow cast by the bridge, out of the white glare of the moonlight. "Please respect my incognito. This is the first chance I have had to speak with you alone. Where are you bound?"

"Oh, anywhere. Around the world, I guess. To forget."

"Your wife, Thaida?"

"You know of her death, then?"

"Yes. The knowledge came to me in my exile. I can not explain how. You know there was some psychic bond between us. I mistook it for love. She had the wisdom to know better. And the boy?"

"Back in a school in the States. He's a straight, manly little chap, Clarke, and the very image of Thaida."

"Then you've plenty left to live for, old fellow. But right now I suppose you are seeking the Lotus."

"It was my old family doctor's idea, to travel. I suppose he thought if I went off my head altogether it would save him a lot of fuss and bother to have it happen among strangers. I think I was queer at times."

"I've got a prescription for you then that's better than any he has in his *materia medica*."

"What is it?"

"Work."

"As keen on the scent of a mystery as ever, I see, Clarke, but you'll have to stretch your imagination to the limit to find one aboard this ship, I'm thinking."

"On the contrary, our *compagnons de voyage* offer some problems as puzzling as any we ever wrestled with."

"I concede it, if you are interested in matching various shades of gray. That is the color with which my observation has stamped them. A dozen women with *ayahs* to hook them up twice a day and as many *ayahless* ones whose husbands perform that office. The men are deadly dull. There's the usual amount of drinking and inane conversation in the snuggery. Dress represents the ultimate of mental excitement with the women, whist with the men. A couple of card-sharps and a rattling game of poker would be a relief. You are the only ray of real interest I've seen. I'm burning to hear the story. Why this elaborate disguise? I never should have known you if you hadn't spoken."

"Mine is a long story. You'll hear it by fragments. The disguise was well enough in India, but here it excludes me by the inexorable laws of caste from free association with the first-saloon passengers. As I can not, for good reasons, abandon it yet, you are to be my other and more respectable self."

"Then there is actually work to be done? You are not merely conjuring up a mystery to get me out of myself?"

"You'll find the work very real, I suspect. Have you noticed aboard a certain Baron von Gersdorff?"

"I've seen him swaggering about the smoking-room and sweltering under the awnings. Who is he?"

"That's another long story. I'd rather have your judgment of his actions henceforth unbiased by any previous knowledge. I want you to watch him; to report every move he makes. If possible, get into his confidence. But be on your guard. He's a dangerous customer if you cross him. I don't mind telling you that the game you are taking a hand in is that of *welt politische*. And the cards are never played above the table."

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"Who are the others? The baron is not playing solitaire, I suppose."

"It's a three-handed game. You know whom we have aboard. No less a personage than Sir Arthur Orminston, Lieutenant-Governor of the Northwest Provinces, and Lady Clara Orminston. You are aware who she was?"

"The famous Clara Leighton of the Gaiety forces. I've brushed up my knowledge of the nobility since leaving Bombay."

"Exactly. She's years younger than Sir Arthur, as your eyes have no doubt told you."

"Another mésalliance of the title with the tinsel."

"On the contrary, she appears to be making him a very excellent wife. She's immensely popular among the Governmental set at Simla."

"She is decidedly the most fascinating woman on board," I said.

"I'll go farther than that. She is the most fascinating woman, with one exception, that I ever saw in my life."

I bowed my head at the delicacy of Clarke's exception.

"I suppose it is Sir Arthur and not the lady who must suffer my espionage. You spoke of a third."

"Yes. Mlle. Irma Mazareff. Do you know her?"

"A big, handsome blonde, the type that is irresistible to most men. Mlle. Irma has been flashing her beautiful shoulders at me and trying to fascinate me with her green eyes. As every man aboard has enjoyed the same favors, I have not been unduly arrogant over the conquest. It merely aroused interest enough to identify her from the name on her steamer chair. That's all I know about her."

"I will enlighten you. She is an American."

"I judged so from the type, despite the combination of the French 'mademoiselle' with a Russian surname. She exists by the hundreds along Broadway."

"Broadway was her preparatory school. She has taken a post-graduate course since in half the courts of Europe. Now what I particularly want to know is whether any bond exists between her and Von Gersdorff. That is the link I have been unable to supply and for which I look to you."

"But she and Lady Clara are quite intimate. I can tell you that much already."

"All the more reason to watch her. Lady Clara is as ingenuous as a child. If Mlle. Irma is cultivating her acquaintance it means no good. She may be acting under Von Gersdorff's orders. He may be moving against Sir Arthur behind the skirts of the women. Or it may be some new form of blackmail on her own account."

"Is blackmail her pet villainy?"

"Her more recent exploit was securing the letters which the maharajah of one of the northern independent states, a particularly fascinating sort of Oriental, had written to the young wife of an elderly general at Simla. She corrupted the lady's *ayah*, I believe. The girl was just out from England with a head full of romantic ideas about the glory of India's ancient civilization, without the restraining balance of an appreciation of caste and the expedience of the iron heel. Mlle. Irma collected handsomely. But blackmail is merely a side line. Her regular traffic is in important international secrets."

"Doesn't Sir Arthur know her reputation?"

"I doubt it. Aside from an exhaustive knowledge of Indian politics of the heavier sort, Sir Arthur doesn't know much beyond his rubber of whist and his desire to gratify every whim of his wife."

"HAVE the Baron and Irma worked together before?"

"Not that I know of. I have no evidence that there is the slightest bond of unity between them. That is what I want you to find out. I have trailed Von Gersdorff all the way from Nepal. I know pretty much all about him and his schemes. So when I find a secret envoy of the Czar on the same ship with the Governor of a big portion of England's jealously guarded Northern India frontier, isn't it enough to make the limitations of this disguise irksome? Then when you add Mlle. Irma, who will turn her hand either way for gold, and the fascinating and unsuspecting Lady Clara, I think you have the ingredients for mystery enough to take your mind off yourself."

"And where am I to find you if I have anything to report?"

"You'll have difficulty finding me. It is best that I keep under cover. If you learn anything, write it and put it in 'Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy' in the library.

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No one on this ship is likely to bother it there."

"Now, tell me about yourself, Clarke. I'm burning to hear your story. Did you succeed in reaching Lhasa?"

"I've something to show you first," he replied, as he drew me to the rail where we could look down upon the mass of humanity that the stifling heat of the Asiatic steerage had driven out upon their scant breathing space on the forecastle deck.

It was early for the Coronation rush. The main body of England's native soldiery would come by troop-ship later, but we were apparently carrying an advance-guard.

Clarke's hand directed my attention to a group: three excessively tall, slender, bearded and drab-turbaned fellows, who stood in the little triangle formed by the anchor chains where they came through the hawse-hole. They stood with folded arms looking up at the lights of the first saloon, like some weird Oriental conception of the three fates.

"Who are they?" I asked in a whisper.

"Thugs from the Punjab," whispered Clarke. "They are almost the last of their terrible race. Murder for the gratification of their horrible divinity, Kali, the bloody-minded wife of Siva, is their form of worship. It's seldom they go so far afield for their prey. God help the man upon whom they set their mark!"

"Are they trailing some one on this ship?" I asked, in an awed whisper.

"Undoubtedly."

"But who? Why?"

"I don't know yet. That is part of the mystery. I only show them to you to prove that it does not do to brand a shipload of humanity as gray until you have studied all its elements."

We heard a step behind us. Clarke slipped back into the shadow. When I looked for him he had vanished as silently and mysteriously as he had come.

CHAPTER II

MY ENCOUNTER WITH THE BARON

I TURNED to see who had interrupted us and encountered the Captain, Davidson, R. N. R., returning from his after-dinner visit to the smoking-room. I casually lighted a cigarette and strolled over to meet him before he mounted the companion to the bridge.

"Ah, still enjoying the night, Mr. Sexton. That's right. Make the most of it while you may. When we get into the Red Sea you'll find the days so insufferably hot that the nights are too short to cool off the brass work. I've never tried frying an egg on the drum of the steam-winch, but I venture it could be done."

"It's certainly too beautiful to go in now," I answered nonchalantly. "By the way, I notice we have a native in the first cabin. I'm curious about him."

"First one I ever carried first saloon below the rank of a rajah. He's some ultra high-caste Buddhist from the up-country. Religious as old Budd himself, I suspect. It took considerable pull, as you Americans put it, to get him in with you toffs. I was given to understand the line of influence went right back to the Viceroy himself. I hope the fellow isn't objectionable to you."

"Not in the least," I hastened to say. "He seems quite inoffensive. And, besides, you must remember that in America we are quite democratic. We spent four years, a good many millions and a considerable quantity of blood to settle that question of 'race, color and previous condition of servitude.'"

"I've had no complaint of the chap so far. He seems to know his place. Most of the beggars do, which inclines me to believe, Mr. Sexton, that England has settled the question a trifle more effectively than your country has. Well, I will bid you good-night."

Captain Davidson left me again alone. I turned to go to my cabin. Clarke certainly had given me something to think about besides myself. I welcomed the change, and went to my berth with a lighter heart than I had carried in months.

THE next day the effect of the magician's touch vanished. My ship companions resumed the drab tone of the commonplace. But I set faithfully to work upon the mission Clarke had entrusted to me. Baron Von Gersdorff, blond-bearded and huge, was the first of the quartette whom I encountered. He was lounging in the smoking-room, insolence and offensiveness in his very attitude.

The fair Irma I found in the music-room on my wanderings through the ship. She was idly turning the pages of a book. Sir Arthur and Lady Orminston had not put in

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an appearance at the breakfast-table. In fact, although the weather was fine and all the early invalids again at table, they continued to take most of their meals in their suite.

I ignored the half challenge in Irma's lifted eyes and returned to the smoking-room. I had selected Von Gersdorff as the first objective. I had a better chance of approaching him than either Sir Arthur or Lady Clara, nor was I well enough armed to match wits with Mlle. Mazareff.

I boldly drew my chair up to the Baron's table and began one of those utterly inane smoking-room conversations. By some freak of such conversations—or was it deep intent upon the baron's part—our talk turned upon pearls. As I remember, it came about through my expressing my regret that my hasty journey prevented my taking the all-water trip around India and visiting the fisheries of Ceylon, in which I always had been interested.

"Pearls!" roared the baron, in his deep voice. "The present age knows nothing about pearls. Not three decent pearls have been found since the days when the courtiers of Louis XIV ground up the world's greatest pearls and dried the ink on their love-letters with the powder. You admire pearls? Come with me. I'll show you something worth seeing."

I followed him, delighted at my progress. To gain the fore companion it was necessary to pass the entrance to the music-room.

The Baron halted a moment at the door and looked in. Lady Clara had come in since my first visit. She was seated at one of the writing-tables with her face toward us. I saw her raise her eyes to those of the Baron. When she observed that he was accompanied, they dropped instantly. A vivid red blush suffused her beautiful face. This was followed by a pallor as the blood went back out of her cheeks. She held her eyes down and toyed nervously with a pearl-handled penholder. Irma, who was seated upon a divan by the door, could see us all perfectly.

The Baron smiled an inscrutable smile and then went on down the companion, with me at his side. I could have sworn that Clarke had misjudged. When a woman graduates from the London Gaiety into Calcutta and Simla official life, it takes more than the idle glance of a passing stranger to bring a blush to her cheek, no matter how correct her conduct may be. The bond undoubtedly was between the Baron and the wife of the Lieutenant-Governor. Irma was still an unknown factor.

"A handsome woman, Lady Orminston. Quite a different type, don't you think, Baron, from Mlle. Irma Mazareff?" I remarked.

He turned and looked at me intently for a second. Apparently he read nothing but indifference in my countenance.

"Women, bah!" he roared. "The devil's tools. Use them if you're on the business of the devil. Then throw them away."

His tone was not pleasant. I was willing to let the subject drop.

As I entered behind the Baron into his cabin the first thing that drew my attention was a woman's glove lying on the floor. I just caught a fleeting glimpse of it as the Baron's heavy foot came down upon it. With a dexterous kick he sent it under the berth while I heard him mutter a curse.

Opening a handsome leather bag, the Baron took out a jewel-case, and springing open the top, held it for my inspection. I gave an exclamation of admiration and surprise. There, nestling in its little bed of white silk wool was the most wonderful pearl I have ever seen. Pear-shaped, an inch in length and nearly three quarters in its greatest breadth, it actually seemed to light the cabin with its mellow luster.

"It is wonderful!" I gasped.

"It is the most wonderful pearl in the world!" came the deeply intoned voice of the Baron.

The pearl was beautiful; that was without question. But the Baron's pride in it was offensive. I ransacked my memory for a famous gem with which to compare it to its detriment.

"What have you to say of the famous pearl of the Shah of Persia?" I asked. "That is pear-shaped, perfect, and, I believe, nearly three inches in length."

"You mean the one sold to the Shah in the seventeenth century by Jean Francois Tavernier for £110,000. You know very little about pearls or you would know that it has long since disappeared. I know the weight, shape and luster of every pearl from the one that Cleopatra offered to Antony dissolved in vinegar down to the present time. The one you mention is the only one ever found that exceeded this in size. That also came from the pearl-fishery of Catifa,

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off the Arabian coast, the same mentioned by Pliny.

"This pearl weighs sixty-three carats. Another, which Tavernier sold to Shaista Kahn, weighed fifty-five. Both the olive-shaped pearl and the peacock pearl of the Grand Mogul were much smaller. This exhausts the list. The pearl-fisheries of the present are producing nothing to compare with the finds of the divers of the Persian Gulf, who went down with beeswax in their ears and their nostrils bound with slivers of horn. This is the only one left of their finds, and it is the greatest."

"And no doubt this one also has a history," I said, nettled at his arrogant display of learning.

"Its history is written in blood. Men have died for it. Men will die for it again. Perhaps I shall be one of them. It is not well to speak of such things."

"I had hoped, Baron, that you would have an interesting story to tell in connection with it," I said boldly.

"No," he replied curtly. "To have seen the most wonderful pearl in the world, is not that enough?"

I started to lift the jewel from its nest, the better to examine it. His hand gripped my wrist. His eyes blazed. I hastened to apologize for my *faux pas*.

"I promised that you should see it," he said rudely. "I did not say that you should touch it!"

He hastily snapped shut the case, and flinging it carelessly upon the berth, intimated that my visit was at an end. With whatever formality of thanks that came to my mind I turned to leave. He followed me, and I noted that he did not tightly close his cabin door. I made bold to call his attention to the fact.

"Have we thieves aboard, or ladies and gentlemen?" he said gruffly.

I already had come to the conclusion that the Baron was neither entertaining nor pleasant company, so I held my peace.

"It would serve him right to lose it," I thought.

We returned to the smoking-room together by way of the aft companion. The conversation reverted to commonplaces and the Baron answered in monosyllables. I made my adieux and sat alone at one of the chess tables, where I pretended to be working out problems. My eyes, however, were constantly on the alert.

CHAPTER III

THE GLOVE

PRESENTLY I saw the Baron rise hastily and leave the room. I followed him at a discreet distance and watched him enter the music-room. Standing at the rail on the hurricane-deck I commanded a view of the interior through an open port.

Lady Orminston sat at the writing-table. Mlle. Irma appeared to be engrossed in her book. Several other knots of women were gathered about the tables and divans, and the room was heavy with subdued feminine chatter.

As the Baron entered, Lady Clara bent her head over her writing, while I could see the red again mounting into her cheeks. He walked boldly up and stood as if about to address her, his eyes on the doorways. I hastily entered the room and walked casually by. At all hazards I determined to play eavesdropper. I caught the Baron's whisper as he bent over Lady Clara's shoulder.

"Have you no heart, no memory of the past?" he said.

"Oh, why do you persecute me?" she said, her frightened eyes going from one doorway to the other.

"It is not too late yet to make me happy again."

"Quick! Leave me," she implored. "Don't you see you are killing me?"

"Ah, madame expects her lord."

"He must never know."

"Perhaps. There is a way to keep all knowledge from him."

Her looks brightened.

"I can not talk to you here. We must not know each other. You will ruin me. Listen. I have a friend, Mlle. Mazareff. She will find a means to communicate with you."

The Baron's face lighted with joy. He left the table and hastily quitted the room.

Lady Clara, her face still burning, got up and took a seat on the divan beside Irma, whose nose had been buried in her book. They conversed rapidly, Lady Clara pouring a story into Irma's ear. Her countenance was full of the play of mirth. She was acting a part, without doubt. Therefore the story she was telling was not the literal truth. Without absolute rudeness I could not get close enough to hear. Lady Clara's voice rose and I caught her last sentences:

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"Now, you must not think me frivolous, my dear. You know it is only curiosity and a chance to study that remarkable animal, man. We must have something to occupy our minds or we shall die of ennui."

"I understand," laughed Irma.

Then she hastily turned the leaves of her book, found her place, dog-eared the page, and getting up, returned it to its shelf. She left the room with a backward look full of meaning at Lady Clara.

While I was hesitating whether to follow her or to await developments, the Baron entered and, without looking at Lady Clara, went directly to the bookcase and took down the identical volume Irma had been reading. I had marked it carefully with my eye.

"Ah," I thought, "Clarke and I are not the only ones conducting a clandestine correspondence via the ship's library!"

The baron turned the leaves of the book as if following a method. Evidently he found what he was after, for he returned the book to the shelf and left the room. He had no more than cleared the doorway when the volume was in my hands.

"'Ivanhoe.' Not a likely work," I thought, "for either Irma or the Baron to pick up for a moment's amusement."

I turned the pages. A page in the thirteenth chapter had been heavily dog-eared. I rebent the page along the crease. The corner came to an italicized line:

Take heed to yourself, for the Devil is unchained.

It was the message by which the usurper Prince John learns that his brother, King Richard, has at last escaped the power of the perfidious Duke of Austria.

"The Devil," I thought. "Sir Arthur seems to fill that rôle. He suspects something, but the Baron has the head of a bull and refuses to exercise caution."

Highly pleased with my morning's work, I sat down at a vacant desk to prepare my report to Clarke. After setting out my observations in detail, including my visit to see the pearl in the Baron's cabin, I could not resist a little dig.

"For once, Clarke," I wrote, "you must give me credit for admirable sagacity. Your deep political plot has, I fear, dwindled to a thoroughly reprehensible flirtation between a young wife and a big and handsome foreigner. The adjectives are for the sake of euphony, for I can not admire the lady's taste."

I slipped the sealed envelope into "Burton" and went to the smoking-room to watch for the Baron. He was not there, so I sat down at a chess-table to await him. I had been seated but a short time when a steward put into my hand an envelope. It was addressed in Clarke's well-remembered hand. Apparently my report had lost no time reaching him. I read his brief note with amazement.

"You have made yourself the unwitting tool of a desperate and despicable villain. Continue to play the part. When the storm breaks, say nothing of the glove."

What on earth did he mean? Ten years, evidently, had not cured Clarke of the habit of mystifying me.

BARON VON GERSDORFF rushed in while I was still puzzling over the note. Apparently he was greatly excited. He cast his eye wildly over the room. I hastily stuffed Clarke's letter into my pocket.

"Oh, there you are!" he cried, rushing up and seizing me by the arm. "Come with me. You can identify it. It is an outrage! I go to the Captain!"

"What do you mean?" I cried.

"The pearl! My wonderful pearl! It has been stolen!"

"It's your own fault. I warned you about the door."

"The forces I am fighting stand not upon locked doors," he replied as he dragged me along the deck and up the companion to the Captain's cabin. To the Captain he poured out an excited story, turning now and then to me for corroboration.

"It was in my stateroom; on the berth. This gentleman saw it. And then we left. After about an hour I go back; it is gone. I tell you it is gone! No money in the world can repay the loss."

"What's gone, in the name of heaven?" exclaimed the Captain.

"My pearl. My wonderful pearl. The most marvelous gem in all the world. It was to the Czar himself that I destined it as a gift. Only in the royal treasures of Russia should such a perfect gem rest. And now it is stolen!"

The Captain looked blank. It was much the same as going into the bosom of a man's family and informing him that one of his children is a thief.

"Stolen is a harsh word, Baron, in a

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ship's company such as this," I broke in testily. "I have a personal interest in this matter, I believe. As far as I know, I was with you the last time you saw the pearl. How do I know but that you may accuse me? Suppose we get down to essentials. Have you made a thorough search? Is it not possible that you mislaid it? Have you questioned the stewards?"

"I'll answer for every steward and sailor on the ship!" thundered the Captain.

"And for the passengers also, I hope," I said.

"Most certainly."

"I do not suspect a steward nor a sailor," said the Baron bluntly. "Also, I did not mislay the pearl, as this gentleman suggests. I repeat that it was stolen."

"Then out with it, man! Whom do you suspect?" I demanded.

"I suspect a passenger. Furthermore, I have proof. It was a woman. Here, see what I find upon the cabin floor when I return."

The Baron drew from his pocket the identical woman's glove I had seen him kick under the berth! It was on my lips angrily to expose the cheat when Clarke's warning restrained me.

CHAPTER IV

CLARKE TAKES THE FIRST TRICK.

THE Captain took the dainty glove and held it in his broad palm, looking at it in perplexity. I was in a quandary. Then Clarke's command, "Continue to play the part," came to mind. Whatever the baron's game was, I determined to make him show his hand.

"Have you informed any one on the ship of your loss excepting the Captain and myself?" I asked.

"No one. I had just come from my cabin when I found you in the smoking-room."

"Then take my advice and tell no one." The Captain nodded his head in approval. "Act as if nothing had happened. Captain Davidson has here the key to the problem. He and I will take the glove to the music-room and make inquiry for the owner."

"Ah, but she would not dare to claim it!" objected the Baron.

"She may not know where she lost it. She may claim it thoughtlessly. It will be better if you are not there to arouse her suspicions."

"You're right, Mr. Sexton," said the Captain. "Come with me to the music-room and I'll venture we will find the owner. You, Baron, had better not be present."

The Baron continued to offer some slight objections, but they were so weak that I gathered he was secretly pleased. The Captain cut him short by taking me by the arm and together we went down to the music-room.

Despite the Captain's injunction, we had no sooner entered than I observed Von Gersdorff standing in the port entry, almost filling it with his bulky frame. He must have followed us and crossed over by the forward rail. It was too late to back out, for the fat was in the fire.

Quite a company of women were present making a pretty picture in their smart afternoon toilettes. My eye quickly signaled out the two, for one of whom I felt the next few minutes would have more than a passing interest. Lady Clara and Mlle. Irma were seated *tête-à-tête*, conversing, I suppose, about the innumerable nothings that go to make up a woman's life.

"Ah, ladies," began the Captain with mock courtesy. "This glove has been found. Mind, I do not promise that a handsome prince waits to claim the hand that can wear it."

The buzz of conversation ceased. Several women glanced at the glove with slight interest. Lady Clara, however, jumped up with a little cry:

"Oh, Captain, I expect it is mine. I'm forever losing them. Where was it found?"

"It was handed to me by a passenger," replied the Captain evasively.

"Yes, it is mine," said Lady Orminston, examining the glove. "A small matter, of course, but annoying to break a pair. Mine are always either all lefts or all rights. Thank you, Captain, and give my thanks to Prince Charming."

Nothing could have been more natural, more ingenuous than Lady Clara's manner. I looked at Irma Mazareff. Still seated, she leaned forward, her hands clasped over one knee, her green eyes drinking in every detail of the little tableau. Suddenly the contrast between the two women struck me as that between a helpless bird and a snake in the jungle.

As Lady Clara turned to resume her seat she found herself face to face with Baron von Gersdorff. He had entered and pushed

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his way through the little knot of women to the center of the room. She started back, the color left her face and was succeeded by a deadly pallor.

Von Gersdorff laid a detaining hand upon the Captain's arm.

"Captain Davidson," he said in a whisper audible throughout the room. "There is the jewel thief! I demand that her cabin be searched!"

LADY CLARA gave a frightened little cry. She swayed, and for a moment I thought she was going to faint. Then by a supreme effort of self-control she steadied and met the Baron's look with blazing eyes.

Before Captain Davidson could find a loophole out of the embarrassing situation, a tall man, gray-haired and mustached, pushed his way through the crowd and faced the trio. It was Sir Arthur Orminston. Lady Clara clutched his arm and then fell weeping convulsively on his shoulder.

"Captain Davidson, what is the meaning of this?" said Sir Arthur in a quiet tone.

"This man, Baron Albert von Gersdorff," said the Captain, enunciating each syllable with meaning emphasis, "has made a serious charge against Lady Clara. It seems, according to his story, that a valuable pearl has disappeared from his cabin. A glove, he says, was found on the floor. Lady Clara has just claimed the glove. As for what I think about it, well, dash it, the regulation that makes the Captain a neutral factor in disputes between passengers can go to the devil, begging your pardon, ladies. I'm sorry, sir, that a lady should be subjected to such an insult on my ship."

A chorus of handclapping on the part of the feminine contingent greeted this speech. At the same time I took mental note of the atavistic rapidity with which Sir Arthur's right hand sought his left hip, where his ancestors of a generation or two back would have found and drawn a sword. You still see the same motion toward an empty hip pocket in the tame and unwoolly West. Then turning to the Captain, with admirable self-control, he said:

"Captain Davidson, my respect for you and for the ladies and gentlemen present prevents me from publicly chastising this scoundrel. As for you [to Von Gersdorff] as soon as you get ashore I shall certainly demand satisfaction of you!"

"A very fine sentiment, and it does Sir Arthur credit," replied Von Gersdorff, insolently measuring with his eye his opponent's slender frame. "But fine sentiments bring not back my pearl. I demand of you, Captain, that the cabin of the lady be searched."

"By Jove, Sir Arthur! Be pleased to carry your card right now. It's a —— outrage, that's what it is!" burst out an irrepressible English lieutenant, Mayfield by name.

Captain Davidson turned helplessly to Sir Arthur. Lady Clara, however, instantly looked up, and in a tear-choked voice said:

"There must be no fighting over this absurd matter. Sir Arthur, let this man have his will. Let every one here be present and see how baseless this ridiculous charge is."

"By heaven, no! I'll see him eternally —— before I'll submit you to such an indignity!" roared Sir Arthur.

"It might be the quickest way of confounding the accusation," diplomatically suggested the Captain.

"You don't think for a minute——"

"Please do, Sir Arthur," broke in Lady Clara. "This charge has been made before all. Let all be present to witness its absurdity."

The slightest wish of his beautiful wife apparently was law to Sir Arthur.

"Come on then, everybody," he said. "It only makes the debt the heavier."

Sir Arthur and Lady Clara occupied a suite, aft on the promenade deck. There was a pell-mell rush up the fore companion and aft along the deck. Sir Arthur, with Lady Clara on his arm, led the way. The Captain and the Baron followed. I managed to squeeze in next with Mlle. Irma Mazareff, who seemed quite willing to accept my escort.

I longed for the presence of Clarke. My own theorizing on the mystery was rapidly being upset. I felt the case was getting out of my hands. I had seen nothing of him since the night before, when he had so mysteriously risen out of the past. Had it not been for the enigmatical note in my pocket, I should have been inclined to believe our conversation under the bridge a trick of my fancy.

But as we turned into the cross passage on which the Orminston suite opened, I

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saw a dark, turbaned face peering into it from the other side. It was the Buddhist monk I had seen under the awnings, the same I had met and talked with under the shadow of the bridge. Beneath the disguise, the flowing robes of white wool, the dark-stained cheeks and jet-black mustache —the features were those of Carlton Clarke. I quickly signaled to him my helplessness. His brilliant eyes flashed a look of understanding. I read in the look that he had the situation in hand.

WHEN the head of the little procession had gathered in the suite of the Lieutenant-Governor, I again saw the face on the edge of the crowd of those unable to squeeze into the cramped quarters.

"This is the cabin occupied by Lady Clara," announced Sir Arthur. "As her trunks have not been opened to-day, I trust, Captain, that this farce will not lead to the length of examining them."

Lady Clara already had begun to turn out on the berth the contents of her hand luggage, beginning with a black seal-leather handbag, ornamented with silver.

"If she has the pearl," I thought, "it will not be found. Whatever the Baron's motive, she will be too clever for that."

I was mistaken again. Among the heterogeneous collection of nothings that line a woman's handbag like the inside of a boy's pocket, there rolled out a huge pear-shaped pearl!

With a quick glance around, my eye recorded the expressions of the actors in the little drama. Lady Clara's face showed astonishment; Sir Arthur's bewilderment; Mlle. Irma's cunning, and the Baron's triumph, which quickly changed to rage and dismay.

He pounced upon the pearl and held it up to Lady Clara's eyes.

"Ruined! Ruined!" he shouted. "What have you done to it?"

The pearl was dull and lusterless, a sickly yellow thing at which no woman would look twice. Yet in shape and size I could have sworn it was the counterpart of the one he had boastingly displayed to me in his cabin.

The white-turbaned figure forced its way into the stateroom. Despite the angry protestations of those elbowed out of the way, Clarke, by a deft turn of the wrist, slipped the cabin door off the hook, and, forcing it shut, locked it. With the exception of myself and a few others whose football ability exceeded their manners, no one was left in the cabin but the principal actors.

"You will pardon me, Captain Davidson," said Clarke quietly, "for seeming to take command of the situation. I can, however, clear up this little mystery."

"Who are you?" demanded the Captain.

"As my personality is not a factor in what I propose to do, you will pardon me if I continue my incognito."

"It seems to me we at least have a right to know with whom we are dealing," said Sir Arthur suspiciously.

Clarke answered him with a rapid outburst of Hindustani.

The Lieutenant-Governor's eyes opened in surprise.

"If you are able to do it," he said, "I'm sure I don't care who you are."

The dark scowl on the Baron's face suggested that he had defined at least a portion of Clarke's purpose.

"What business is it of this native dog," he blurted, "The theft is proved. The pearl is ruined. That is the finish. But we will see what the London papers have to say when the story reaches them!"

"And the story would lose nothing in the telling when it reached the bazaars of Afghanistan, the palaces of the hill rajahs and the *lamaseries* of Tibet," returned Clarke quickly, with a meaning look at the Baron.

Quick as a flash, he snatched the pearl from the Baron's hand before the fingers could close upon it. Von Gersdorff tried to throw himself upon Clarke, but I seized one arm while Captain Davidson clung to the other.

"At least you will not object, Baron," said the imperturbable Clarke, "to having the luster of your pearl restored without a long immersion in sea-water."

Every one present watched in absorbed interest to see what this strange, resourceful Buddhist, who possessed a perfect command of English, was about to do. No one present seemed inclined to dispute his absolute mastery. The very intonation of his voice, though deferential and without offense, indicated that he was a person who spoke with authority.

"I shall ask you to be so kind as to assist me in my demonstration," he said, turning to Lady Clara.

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She looked to Sir Arthur for guidance, and got a nod to fall in with the stranger's wishes. Clarke extended to her the pearl.

"Please take it," he said, "and hold it close against your throat for five minutes. Sir Arthur, may I trouble you to hold the watch on my little experiment?"

Lady Clara took the pearl and with both hands clasped it against her beautiful throat, left bare by the V-shaped corsage. Sir Arthur marked the minutes upon his heavy gold repeater. It seemed an interminable wait.

"Now let me see the pearl," said Clarke, when at last Sir Arthur indicated that the time was up.

Lady Clara held out her hand. The pearl shone like a pure drop of prisoned starlight and moonglow!

CHAPTER V

THE JUDGMENT AND A SCREAM IN THE NIGHT

THE women gave little shrieks of delight as they looked at the beautiful, lustrous gem in Clarke's dark hand. An exclamation of pleased surprise escaped the Baron. He tried to reach for the pearl, but my hand and that of the Captain still restrained him.

"Just one moment, Baron, and I will return your pearl," said Clarke. "I hope I have proved to the satisfaction of all present that Lady Clara Orminston has just now touched this pearl for the first time. The pearl is the most human of gems, this one, the most human of pearls. It is quick to recognize a 'mother.' Lady Clara is a 'pearl mother.' Her warm-blooded vitality has given life to the pearl through her delicate skin. No further proof is needed that she neither abstracted the pearl from the Baron's cabin nor carried it long enough to deprive it of its luster. The pearl itself has acquitted her of a baseless charge!"

There was a hearty cheer and the white gloved hands of the women beat enthusiastically together.

"Wait a minute," said Clarke, holding up a hand for silence. "The pearl has another duty to perform. As I know its peculiar properties, it is but natural that I should know something of its history—more, I suspect, than its present owner. It is the famous Tear of Buddha.

"It once belonged to the great golden Bodhisat in the Jo-kang at Lhasa. It was rifled from the Jo-kang in 1854 by the Maharajah Surendra Vicrami Sah in the war between Nepal and Tibet. In Lhasa the marvelous susceptibility of the pearl to both good and bad human influence was well known. It became the arbiter of high, middle and low justice. It has the ability to seek out the guilty as well as to shield the innocent."

Mlle. Mazareff had been moving stealthily in the direction of the door. Clarke stepped backward and placed his back against it. The little company in the cabin separated into two converging lines with him as the apex.

"Your watch again, Sir Arthur. Thank you. Now, Mlle. Mazareff, may I ask you also to hold the pearl to your throat for five minutes?"

The blonde woman's green eyes blazed defiance.

"I certainly shall have nothing to do with such nonsense! Let me pass," she replied with fine dignity.

"Perhaps, mademoiselle, you prefer that I procure from the detective bureau of New York the full face and profile photographs of one Josephine Jessop and send them to the chief of the Russian secret police?"

The green eyes did not waver. They met Clarke's with a contemptuous stare.

"Or to the revolutionary committee at Odessa the portrait and marks of identification of Mlle. Olga Swarsenski of the Third Section?"

Clarke's voice was an emotionless monotone.

A look of terror came into the green eyes.

"You speak of persons unknown to me and in whom I have not the slightest interest," she said coldly. "If I can contribute to the amusement of the company by assisting in the exhibition of a native mountebank, I shall sacrifice myself. Life on shipboard is exquisitely dull at best."

She took the pearl from Clarke's extended palm, caddishly lifting it with the tips of her gloved fingers, that she might not be contaminated, even through the kid, by the touch of a brown hand. She held the jewel to her open throat with a bored air. The Baron watched with a contemptuous smile. Sir Arthur, repeater in hand, gave the pearl, I am sure, an additional minute for good measure.

"Quick, drop it into my hand!" com-

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manded Clarke imperiously when Sir Arthur signaled the time up. The woman obeyed. Necks were craned from every angle to see.

The pearl was again a jaundiced, sickly yellow! Clarke permitted himself a little smile of triumph.

"The Tear of Buddha can not lie," he said. "Here, Baron von Gersdorff, is your jewel. You will be fortunate if you find among your female acquaintances a 'healer of pearls' to mother it back to life. The next time I advise you to be more cautious in the selection of a confederate!"

CLARKE'S triumph was complete. Lady Clara was cleared in the eyes of the ship's company. The story of the strange acquittal and the confounding of the Baron and Mlle. Irma would spread through the ship like an epidemic. But the glove on the floor, Lady Clara's blushes and terror, the clandestine correspondence between the Baron and Irma via the ship's library, the deep motives of it all, these were as dark as ever.

The Baron took the lifeless pearl from Clarke's hand with a black look. Both he and Mlle. Irma sought refuge in absolute silence. I studied Lady Clara's face. She kept her eyes studiously averted from the Baron and still clung to Sir Arthur's arm. I turned my head to look at Clarke. He was gone. The door was open. Mlle. Irma had sighted it and was making for it, the Baron following in the wake of her beautiful shoulders. Sir Arthur, Lady Clara, the Captain, myself and the little knot of outsiders alone remained.

"Who is he?" was the question on several pairs of lips at once.

"He is an ultra high caste Buddhist," volunteered the Captain. "Ramchud Singh is his name. At least that's the name he's booked under. I've a pretty good idea we won't know any more than that about him until he wants us to."

"He's not a native. I'm satisfied of that," declared Sir Arthur. "Whoever he is I owe him a great debt. I shall be very sorry if I am unable some day to discharge it."

"Perhaps we shall some day," said Lady Clara. "But why should that woman wish to injure me? I have shown her nothing but kindness since we came on board."

Her tone was so ingenuous and her whole attitude so girlish that the thought of her being capable of deep guile was a shock to me. Yet in the light of my own knowledge I could not help but feel that she might have answered her own question.

"Some woman's jealousy, I suppose," suggested the Captain. "Anyway, the incident is closed."

For want of further knowledge every one was content to let it go at that.

I was burning to see Clarke, to have his keen mind read for me the secret undercurrent of plots and counterplots going on in our little world. But the afternoon waned into deadly tedium. I ransacked the promenade, the hurricane, the passages of the spar deck and even down to the main deck without finding a trace of him. None of the actors in the drama put in an appearance in answer to the dinner-gong.

Captain Davidson left the dining-saloon to go directly to the bridge and I did not even have a word with him. I was left alone with my thoughts. The burden of them was that Lady Clara held the key to the mystery.

After dinner I sought the forward rail of the promenade deck where Clarke had appeared the night before. If he wanted me, there was where he would look for me.

Gradually the chill of the night air drove in the promenaders and occupants of the deck chairs. I was alone. Four bells (ten o'clock) sounded on the gong in the crow's-nest. Five bells and then six sounded and still I waited. I was on the point of giving up and retiring, when I heard a step at my side.

"Well, Sexton, how did you like my little play?" It was Clarke's voice.

"Wonderful, wonderful, Clarke!" I said admiringly. "But I think you succeeded in shielding temporarily a woman with a great potentiality for mischief."

"You mean Lady Clara?"

"Yes. A man, even one blessed with the Baron's aggressiveness, doesn't make advances to a pretty woman without some preliminary encouragement. As for Mlle. Irma, I'll concede you're right. She is just plain cat."

"Then what do you think is back of it? I always like to have your views, for while not luminous, you are often a conductor of light."

"There is nothing back of it except that Lady Clara permitted herself the amuse-

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ment of a dangerous flirtation. I believe at heart she is in love with Von Gersdorff. Mlle. Irma certainly is. There you have sufficient motive for the blonde to play upon the Baron's passion for his famous pearl and revenge herself upon her rival by staging the theft of the jewel."

"My dear Sexton, you have just one point right—the last. And the pearl itself told you that."

"What, then, is back of it?"

"First, what are they saying about me?"

"Oh, every one is properly mystified, of course. It is conceded you are not a native."

"It is unfortunate that I had to appear when the plot was only half worked out. But I couldn't stand aside and see Lady Clara in trouble. But, hallo! Look there!"

Hyde pointed to the steerage deck. I followed the direction of his finger to where two of the three dark, turbaned figures stood at the anchor-chains. With arms folded they looked steadily up to the first cabin.

"What of it?" I asked.

"One of them is gone. There should be three. Surely they would not dare—I had no idea that they would attempt anything before reaching England where some chance of escape would offer."

"Dare what? What do you mean?" I asked.

As if in reply to my questions a hoarse cry rang through the ship, a raucous, vibrant scream of agony! Silence settled over the swiftly moving vessel, broken, an instant later, by the piercing shrieks of a woman.

"Great God! It's too late! Fool that I was not to have warned him! Follow me, quick!"

CLARKE gripped my arm and drew me, running, after him. The deck-watch tried to stop us, but we brushed him roughly aside.

Down the forward companion we raced to the spar-deck where Clarke turned into the starboard passage. Unerringly he was leading me in the direction of Baron von Gersdorff's cabin to which I already had made a visit. It opened on one of the numerous cross passages which Clarke selected without hesitation.

Heads were popping out of the cabin doors, stewards and officers were running about seeking the cause of the unwonted disturbance. No one seemed to be able to locate the direction of the screams until Clarke and I led the way. Thus we were the first to reach the Baron's door with the surging mob at our heels.

The door was on the hook. One glance within froze my blood and brought a cry of horror to my lips.

"We're too late. Heavens, what a ghastly mess!" cried Clarke.

Prone on the floor lay the body of a man. He was clad in a white shirt, trousers and bedroom slippers. Across the pure white of the shirt bosom, like the broad ribbon of the Legion of Honor, stretched a crimson stain. The man was the Baron von Gersdorff. He was dead. The glazed and staring eyes left the point beyond question.

Out of his breast, at the source of the rivulet of red, protruded the turquoise hilt of a dagger. Half clasping the hilt with nerveless fingers was the slender, delicate hand of a woman. Her body was huddled up on the floor beside that of the Baron. She lay fully clothed in exquisite evening dress, face downward, the features concealed by the bent left arm.

As my eyes began to take in details I saw the glint of rings, a cluster of diamonds around a magnificent ruby, and a plain band of gold, on a finger of the upstretched left hand. I had no need to see the face to know the horrible truth.

"My God, Clarke! It's Lady Clara Orminston!" I whispered.

The shock of this plain evidence of her guilt drowned any feeling of triumph over Clarke that I may have felt.

CHAPTER VI

THE UNMASKING OF A CRIMINAL

WE STOOD side by side, blocking the doorway. Behind us the swelling rabble pushed and struggled to enter. In the confusion I was conscious of a scramble at my side. Some one concealed beneath the berth attempted to slip past us in the confusion to be swallowed up in the crowd without.

"No you don't, milady!" cried Clarke, grasping her wrist like a vise. "You'll stay right here till we get at the rights of this affair!"

He swung his captive around until she

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faced the single incandescent burning in the cabin. It was Mlle. Irma Mazareff!

"Quick, Sexton! Shove them back. Get the door closed! Allow none but Captain Davidson to enter."

"The *Mongolia's* third officer, a burly, red-faced man, was struggling with me for entrance. I forced him back far enough to unhook the door. I bore my weight against it, but he thrust his foot into the opening.

"Send for Captain Davidson at once," commanded Clarke.

"My eye, but you've the nerve! Who are you, anyway, you bally nigger, to be givin' me commands? Let me into that cabin, you bloody-minded, murderin' devils, or I'll fire!"

His pistol was out, the shining muzzle pointing through the opening. Clarke turned around, still holding the struggling, screaming Irma. His eyes blazed into the officer's red face:

"Send to the bridge for Captain Davidson, at once! You'll find out who I am quick enough. I'll break you in Leadenhall street, my man. I'll fix you so you'll never get another billet as long as you live, if you don't obey and get out of that door!"

"Holy Cripes! He must have a bit of gold lace on under that bally angel's robe!" said the officer, as he withdrew his obstructing foot and shrunk back.

I hastily slammed the door and shot the bolt. A few minutes later Captain Davidson tapped and called his name. I opened the door while he flung back the excited crowd and entered.

"My heavens, man! This is awful," he said, as he surveyed the scene. "Is she dead, too?" pointing to Lady Clara.

"I think not. Only fainted. Hold this scratching tiger-cat while I see," said Clarke.

"Sir Arthur's up on the hurricane-deck. He's got wind something's happened to Lady Clara. He's running up and down like a mad elephant calling out her name."

"Then by all means we must keep him out of here till we get at the straight of this. Before I disturb her, Captain, you see how everything lies. It is just as we found it with the exception of dragging this lady out from under the berth."

The Captain gave Clarke a suspicious look as he took the arm of the now quiet Irma.

"Who the devil are you, anyway? How do I know what hand you two may have had in this?"

"Humph! Mr. Sexton and I were on the promenade deck when we heard the screams. The deck-watch saw us. But that's beside the question. When the time comes I'll show you who I am. The thing to do now is to find out what went on in this cabin within the last half-hour!"

Clarke bent over Lady Orminston and examined her.

"Just a faint," he said. "Here, Sexton, help me lift her into the berth."

I obeyed, and she lay there breathing fitfully. Clarke bathed her forehead from the water-pitcher. Her eyes opened for a moment and she stared dumbly around. Then she gave a piercing shriek and relapsed into unconsciousness.

"Send for Dr. Grant, Captain. She's had a terrible shock. She will require immediate and careful attention."

WHILE we were waiting for the Doctor, who, as it afterward developed, was sitting in a quiet game of cards in the chief engineer's cabin, totally unconscious of all the excitement above, Clarke questioned Irma.

"I know very little about it," she said boldly. "I was passing this cabin on the way to my own when I heard the Baron scream. I rushed in just in time to see him fall. Lady Clara's hand was on the knife. As he fell she seemed to faint and fell over as you found her. I screamed loudly and then I too must have fainted and rolled under the berth."

"Then why did you try to escape?"

"I was frightened and horrified. I did not know what I was doing."

"Did you see Lady Clara strike?"

"No. I have told you all I know. At the moment I entered, the Baron was falling. She fell over at the same instant. The blow had already been struck."

The arrival of the ship's Doctor put an end to the inquiry. He set about restoring Lady Clara. She soon regained consciousness, but hid her face in her hands, moaning and crying.

Clarke took her in hand as gently as possible.

"Can you tell us, Lady Clara, what happened here?"

"I know nothing about it," she moaned.

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"I was passing the door of the stateroom. I heard a cry from within. I started to run, when a hand reached out and seized me. I was dragged inside. That is the last I remember."

"What were you doing on this deck? Your suite is two decks above," demanded Clarke.

"I—I lost my way. I—I thought I was on the promenade deck."

To my mind the admission was fatal. By no possible twist of the imagination could she have mistaken the enclosed spar-deck for the open reaches of the promenade. I looked at the Captain, who gave me a significant nod. Clarke, however, did not seem inclined to pursue his advantage.

In the meantime Lady Clara became hysterical, shrieking and wringing her hands. Apparently the fatal weakness of her story was patent to her. Dr. Grant put an end to further investigation by giving her a hypodermic. She passed into a deep sleep. Outside we heard the excited voice of Sir Arthur, who was crying out and beating his fists on the door.

"Let me speak to him," said Clarke.

He went to the door, which I opened a few inches, bracing my body firmly against it.

"Sir Arthur," said Clarke, "I hope you will go to your cabin and wait there until Lady Clara can be moved. Any further shock may result disastrously to her. She is alive and unharmed. Rest assured she is absolutely guiltless of any wrong-doing. She merely has become entangled in an embarrassing and dangerous *contretemps*. Your part is to give her entire faith and leave it to us to extricate her. Will you trust me to prove that she deserves it?"

"Thank God, yes! I can not believe this terrible thing they are saying. Let me know when I can be of assistance," came his broken voice.

I closed and bolted the door.

"But I say, old chap, that's a bally shame!" blurted the Captain. "Do you think it's right to prop him up that way? It may nurse him along for a time, but think of the shock when he learns the truth."

"The truth, man! Do you believe this little woman killed that big brute?"

"It certainly looks that way. Can you prove anything to the contrary?"

"I'll prove my case in order. First, how do you explain these marks?"

Clarke lifted the limp left arm of Lady Clara. Clearly defined upon the pearly white wrist were the deep red imprints of fingers.

"I SUPPOSE he struggled with her. He was holding her left arm when she struck with the right."

Irma, who had seated herself, sought to penetrate the veil of Clarke's dark countenance. Her temporary fright was conquered, and her haughty, clear-cut features bore a look of confident defiance. Suddenly Clarke seized her right wrist in his iron grip and with his left hand bent her fingers around Lady Clara's arm.

"See, Captain. Her fingers fit these marks exactly. Look at the big hand of the Baron. Measure your own fingers about this slender wrist. No man's hand has gripped it."

"By Jove, that's so!" said Captain Davidson, carefully examining the marks.

He gave Irma a searching glance.

"Her story falls down in this particular. Therefore it is false. It was she who struggled with Lady Clara. Had you been a quicker thinker, mademoiselle, you would have included the struggle in your story. But you did not know of the evidence you left when you gripped her wrist. You have a far more powerful hand and arm than hers. See, Captain, it is all I can do to hold her."

With a twist Irma tore her hand out of Clarke's grasp. She sat panting, her beautiful shoulders heaving with the effort, the color coming and going from her cheeks.

Clarke smiled. His purpose in taunting Irma into a display of strength became clear when he tore away the blood-stained shirt and undershirt from the Baron's breast.

"Look," he said, triumphantly. "Which of those two hands struck such a blow: the weak, delicate arm of Lady Clara, or the muscular wrist of this athletic, perfectly trained woman?"

Two inches of the hilt of the dagger were buried in the flesh. The point protruded at the back.

"And this knife, mademoiselle, with the monogram I. M. engraved upon the silver butt of the hilt? Did you overlook that damning evidence when you tried to thrust the burden of guilt upon an innocent woman?"

As the coils tightened about her, the ter-

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ror returned to Irma's eyes. She shuddered. In a trembling voice she said:

"I am innocent. I didn't do it. I have told the truth. If she didn't kill him, I don't know who did."

"Keep what you have to say for the courts of England," said Clarke coldly. "There is evidence enough against you right here to give the hangman work!"

Irma sank down in her chair, moaning and wringing her hands.

CHAPTER VII

THE BLOOD PRINT

"CALL a couple of officers, please, and have Mlle. Mazareff taken out," said Clarke to the Captain. "I suggest that you have her removed to the purser's office. We shall have more room there. We will postpone further inquiry until Lady Clara is able to confront her."

"Hang me if I know who you are," bridled the Captain. "I'm willing to follow your lead in this affair because you seem to have laid hands on the guilty woman. But when it comes to the discipline of the ship, I'll thank you to let me attend to that!"

Clarke smiled and bowed acknowledgment of the Captain's authority. I took notice, however, that his suggestions were followed to the letter. Captain Davidson opened the door and gave the second and third officers a crisp order to clear the passages. The rabble melted away from the door. The two officers then entered and, each taking an arm of the unresisting Irma, led her out.

"Can Lady Clara be moved to her own cabin, Doctor?" asked Clarke.

"Yes, and I think she will be better off there."

"Will it be possible to question her soon?"

"She ought to be all right within the hour. I gave her very little morphia."

"I shall not impose on her strength too greatly, of course, but her evidence is vastly important."

Two sailors were summoned with a litter, and under the Doctor's directions carried out the unconscious woman.

Captain Davidson also stepped out of the cabin for a moment to oversee the policing of the passages and to send word to his first officer to take over the bridge until further orders.

"Good, Sexton. What luck! Guard the door. Signal his return," whispered Clarke eagerly.

Like a hound on a fresh scent he went over the floor, the walls of the cabin and the tumbled berth.

"See," he said, picking up the empty jewel-case from the floor. "The pearl is gone. I wonder——"

He made a dive for the body of the Baron and thrust his hand into the opening of the shirt.

"Too late," he said. "The work was well done. The belt about his waist has been rifled. Ah, here's something she overlooked!"

He took a small square envelope from the pocket in the belt. Tearing out the letter he glanced over its pages hurriedly, his face alight with triumph.

"Ah, so the wind was in that quarter!" he mused. "Now the clouds begin to break."

I heard the Captain's step and warned Clarke. He hastily stuffed the letter under his robe.

"I suppose we may as well order this mess cleaned up now," began the Captain. "By the way, you've shown considerable cunning in landing that woman. Maybe you can tell me her motive."

"The motive of the murder was robbery. See, the pearl is gone."

Clarke held up the empty case.

The Captain looked searchingly at Clarke.

"I don't know you or perhaps I shouldn't make the suggestion," he said haltingly. "But you might have gotten away with it yourself, even with Mr. Sexton watching you."

"The best way to meet that accusation will be by finding the thief and murderer. Will that satisfy you?"

"You mean the Mazareff woman has the pearl? Then why didn't you have her searched? She'll have a fine chance to get rid of it."

"I threw the burden of guilt upon Mlle. Mazareff for a purpose. I hope to frighten her into a confession of certain facts leading up to this murder, which she alone can clear. By the time she has thought it over a while in the purser's office I think she will be willing to talk."

"Good Lord! You mean she's not guilty, after all?"

"Not of actual murder, no."

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"But the knife! It was hers. The marks on Lady Clara's wrist. The force of the blow. It must have been her. The theft of the pearl was a ruse. She is jealous of the Baron. She found them together and slew him. Then she tried to fasten the crime on the other woman. It's as plain as day to me."

"A damning case when the facts are taken singly. But view them in connection with this and what have you to say?"

Clarke laid his finger on the side wall of the cabin just under the port. Upon the white paint were the bloody prints of five huge naked toes.

"My word!" exclaimed the Captain, as he swung the light over the grewsome marks. "His own, maybe. In thrashing about and struggling, you know."

Clarke pointed to the Baron's shod feet: "After that blow he didn't stop to put on those silk stockings and slippers."

The argument was unanswerable.

"Great heavens, man, then get to it! What do you know? What do you want me to do? I put myself unreservedly in your hands."

"Thanks. That's just what I want. I was forced to give a certain amount of dramatic value to my case in order to win that confidence. Give me a file of armed men, fellows equal to a fight, if necessary, to bring three chaps out of the Asiatic steerage. Have them bring three sets of hand and leg irons."

"It shall be done."

He went to the door and gave the order to the fourth officer in charge of the guard. Within a few minutes the officer reported with a file of five men armed with muskets.

"Come, Sexton. You might as well go. I'd like to have your hand if there's a fight. Will you lend him a revolver, Captain? Thanks, I'm armed," and Clarke drew aside the folds of his white tunic and displayed a formidable English service revolver strapped in a holster at his waist.

THE fourth officer led us into the dark labyrinth of the steerage. It looked like a hopeless task to pick three natives out of the hundreds that swarmed the row of bunks, tiered one on top of the other clear to the roof. One after another the sailors jabbed them out with the muzzles of their muskets. They cursed us in English learned in no mission and in half a dozen different native dialects.

To each Clarke put a rapid question in Hindustani. At last one native motioned quickly and turned his brown eyes up to the top bunk opposite. He then pulled in his head and buried it under the not overly clean covers.

"They're up there. Now the question is to get them out," said Clarke.

"First thing let's have a look at the swine. Here, give me a leg up," said the fourth officer.

He climbed up the tier of bunks, holding in one hand a pocket electric flash.

"My word, three of them, just like bloomin' babes in the wood, sir. Pass us up a musket an' I'll poke the rotters out. Come, show a leg there, bright-eyes!"

"Come down, quick!" ordered Clarke.

There was a flash of white out of the top bunk. The body of the officer came hurtling down. He sat up on the floor and rubbed his neck ruefully.

"Sufferin' ash-cats! What did the bloody-minded minstrel try to do to me? Is my bally head still on?"

"It's the closest shave you'll have in many a day," said Clarke. "He had the Punjab lasso about your neck. If he'd got a good twist on it you'd be a dead one now."

"Gawd!" exclaimed the officer.

"It's a problem, getting them out of there, Sexton. Of course we can overpower them and drag them out by force of numbers, but somebody is pretty sure to get skewered in the mêlée. Here, my man"—to one of the sailors—"run as fast as you can to the Doctor. You'll find him in Suite 344 of the promenade deck most likely. Tell him to send us a couple of sulphur fumigating candles."

"Wait a minute. The carpenter has plenty of them. Here, you, run along to 'Chips' and tell him to send us a couple of stink-pots. We uses 'em to get the perfume and the cockroaches out of this here boudoir."

When the candles came Clarke directed the sailors to climb the bunks at the right and left and stretch blankets about the one in which the Thugs lay. He then lighted one of the sulphur candles and, climbing up, thrust it under the blanket. Several times a brown hand came out and extinguished it, bringing a cry of pain as the hand struck the melting sulphur. The candle was relighted and kept at its work.

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The fumes set us all to coughing and sputtering. The atmosphere of the entire compartment was rapidly becoming unbearable. How Clarke stood it, getting as he did the worst of what escaped from the blanket, was a mystery. We could hear the Thugs choking.

"My word, but it's gettin' stiffin'! We'll all be dead men if the beggars don't give in soon," sputtered the officer.

There was a scramble above. Clarke came down like a cat. Three tall brown forms followed, choking and gasping for air.

The sailors fell upon them. There was plenty of fight left in the trio, and they lashed about viciously with their short knives or krisses. One sailor got a nasty cut over the eye before they were overpowered and ironed.

"Bring them along and hold them in readiness when I want them in the purser's office," panted Clarke.

We left the officer at his work and hurried out of the stifling hole.

CHAPTER VIII

LADY CLARA'S SECRET

"QUITE a little family party, you see," said Captain Davidson nervously, as Clarke and I entered the purser's office.

The Captain sat at the purser's desk smoking like a man a month without the taste of tobacco. Doctor Grant lounged in a chair, chatting with Irma, her chair tilted back, one knee thrown carelessly over the other, a cigarette hanging between her red lips.

Clarke and I took chairs and joined the circle.

"Now, then," said the Captain, straightening up with a jerk, "I hope we can sift this nasty mess to the bottom. I never thought such a thing could happen on a ship of mine."

"Has anything been said?" asked Clarke.

"Not a word. The Doctor and the lady have been just like a Dorcas society, only a little more worldly, I suspect."

"I hope's she's made up her mind to tell the truth." Then turning to Irma, "You may as well understand, first as last, mademoiselle, that the jig is up."

"Ah, the holy Buddhist monk turns out to be an American!" she replied with a smile.

"You are quick to recognize an Americanism, mademoiselle. I should have thought you would have buried all that under the cloak of your cosmopolitan culture."

"Pouf! One hears American slang everywhere. Your countrymen are great travelers."

"Possibly you also recall from your New York life that American juries are very lenient with a pretty woman. You will not find it so in England. English law has no compunctions against hanging, regardless of sex."

Irma shrugged her shoulders and puffed a cloud of smoke.

"I am innocent. My innocence will cry out from the ground. You can prove nothing against me!"

"What were you doing in Von Gersdorff's cabin?"

"I was passing to my own stateroom. I heard a scream and a fall. Lady Clara was coming out the door. On the impulse of the moment, I seized her and dragged her back. Then I fainted. That is everything that I remember."

"And you sought to throw the guilt upon her."

"I believed her guilty until you pointed out the force of the blow. Now I am at a loss to know who killed him."

"What was your purpose in wishing to injure Lady Clara?"

"I hate her!"

"Why?"

"Who can tell why a woman hates?"

"Was it on Von Gersdorff's account—a little jealousy, perhaps?"

"Pouf! I never saw the man until I came on board this ship."

"Then perhaps this line," Clarke quoted, "'Take heed to yourself, for the Devil is unchained.' It was the line on the dog-eared page of 'Ivanhoe.'"

The light went out of Irma's eyes. She paled. The cigarette dropped from her lips and was burning a hole in the fold of her skirt when the Doctor put his foot on it.

"You know a great deal," she said, recovering herself. "But this time you are wrong. I used it, I admit. But it was nothing. An idle flirtation. Life is dull at sea. What would you have? I am no more than a woman after all. Would I sit by and

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twiddle my thumbs while that little black-haired chit tried her musical hall arts upon him? Look at my hair. The day and the night have been too long at war for me to call a truce."

"What makes you think Lady Clara was trying to win the Baron?"

"Why else should she blush and drop her eyes every time he came near? It is a trick she learned in the London halls. When a married woman blushes and trembles at the approach of a stranger it means either art or a past."

Clarke turned and bent his black eyes close to those of Irma.

"It is quite ingenious of you, mademoiselle," he said, "to give this affair the simple flavor of an idle flirtation. But, distasteful as it is, I fear I shall have to order you searched."

"Searched! What do you mean?" she exclaimed.

"I mean that when you rifled the pocket of the morrocco leather belt about Baron Von Gersdorff's body you overlooked this," and Clarke drew from his robe a square envelope.

Like a flash Mlle. Mazareff threw herself upon him. A silver stiletto, snatched out of her corsage, glittered in the air. The Captain, the Doctor and I jumped up, upsetting our chairs. Clarke's hand and eye had been quicker than we, quicker than Irma's desperate lunge at his breast. His fingers caught her powerful wrist. The knife clattered to the floor. Clarke's left hand made a rapid motion toward the woman and he held in his fingers a package done up in red oiled silk.

Irma sank back in her chair, her cheeks blazing, her bosom rising and falling, her eyes glittering like a tiger's.

"I ask a thousand pardons," said Clarke, panting. "It is not my custom to search women. I saw the corner of the package in your corsage when we struggled. I forgot the respect I owe to your sex. Perhaps it is just as well. You would have tempted a poor stewardess with money to overlook this in her search."

"You shall die for that!" hissed Irma.

Clarke turned to the Doctor.

"Please have Sir Arthur and Lady Clara, if she is able, come down at once. If only I can get Lady Clara to see the matter in the right light, we shall clear the mystery up at once."

WHILE we waited, neither Clarke nor myself took our eyes off of Irma lest she be meditating some fresh treachery. She sat subdued and thoughtful. The game, whatever it was, was going against her. She seemed to realize defeat.

"Ask Lady Clara to enter, and request Sir Arthur to remain outside just for a moment," said Clarke, when the couple were announced.

Lady Clara entered, pale, the terrible strain of the night of tragedy and intrigue still painted in her frightened eyes.

"I hope you have quite recovered from your shock, Lady Orminston," began Clarke. She nodded without speaking. "You believe I was able to do you a service in the matter of the pearl," he continued. "I now wish to do you a much greater one. In short, I called you in first to urge you to make a full confession to Sir Arthur of your relations with Baron von Gersdorff."

She put her hands over her face and began to weep bitterly.

"Oh, no! Not that! Not that!" she sobbed.

"You are giving an entirely wrong impression. Do you think I should have mentioned it before others if there had been anything reprehensible in your conduct? Suppose, in return for what I ask, I were to offer to give you this letter?"

Clarke took from the folds of his robe the square envelope he had displayed to Irma.

"Oh, where did you get it?" cried Lady Clara.

"I took it from the Baron's body. Fortunately a previous searcher overlooked it."

"Then let me have it and destroy it. Sir Arthur must never see it!"

"On the contrary he must see it. More than that, he must receive it from your own hands. Pardon the liberty, but I have read it. If you had told Sir Arthur of this letter at the time of your marriage, you would have saved yourself a great deal of trouble."

"But it is too late now. He would not understand."

"How is a woman to know what a man will understand? I don't like to be firm with you, but unless you consent I shall call Sir Arthur in and give him the letter myself."

"No! No! I will tell him. Give me the letter," she sobbed.

"And I have your promise to hand it to Sir Arthur the moment I give you the word?"

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"Yes, yes. You—you have my promise."

"And you will tell him everything?"

"Oh, no! You tell him. I can not."

"I will try, if you will promise to correct me. Remember I have known your secret less than an hour. I think, Doctor Grant, you may ask Sir Arthur to join us," replied Clarke, as he handed the square envelope to Lady Clara.

Sir Arthur's face was haggard. He had aged perceptibly during the night. He took a seat at the side of his wife and, reaching for her hand, patted it affectionately.

"I hope, Captain, you begin to see a light in this dark business," he said.

Captain Davidson waved to the white robed monk for a reply.

"We have," replied Clarke. "And you will forgive me if in clearing it up I am forced to go into your own family affairs."

"I think I can trust you, sir. Whoever you are, you have proved yourself a gentleman."

"Very well then. It is necessary for this woman, Mlle. Irma Mazareff, to remain. I want her to know how easily refutable are any stories she may hereafter try to circulate."

Sir Arthur bowed for Clarke to proceed.

"Your reason will tell you, Sir Arthur, that before your marriage Lady Clara, petted by all London, had many admirers. Among the most persistent of them was Baron Albert von Gersdorff, the man killed in his cabin to-night. He was living in London because certain political errors made a residence in his own country unsafe. I suspect he told lies enough about the magnificence of his Russian estates and his high position at the court of the Czar to make himself an attractive match to any girl thrown upon the world to make her own living.

"At any rate Lady Clara secretly engaged herself to him. The only evidence of this engagement is contained in the letter which she wrote him telling him that she did not love him and that she could not marry without love no matter what position in life the match carried with it. In this letter she positively broke the engagement."

Clarke nodded to Lady Clara, who silently took the letter from her corsage and placed it in her husband's hand.

Sir Arthur took the letter and without glancing at it tore it into fine bits and tossed it to the floor.

"Anything that Lady Clara Orminston has done or written either before or after her marriage has my entire approval."

He lifted the trembling hand to his lips reverently.

"Dash it!" exclaimed the Captain. "There's a man for you!"

"Why didn't you tell me of this letter before, Kicksie?" said Sir Arthur to his wife.

"I thought you were so dreadfully proud and hated scandal, so I was afraid."

"And you thought I couldn't appreciate the compliment of your giving up a duced high place at the court of the Czar, as you thought, for life at an India hill station! Now tell me why you went to his cabin to-night and how you got mixed up in that affair of the pearl."

"He threatened me when I broke off with him. He wrote me terrible letters, and tried to see me repeatedly. I wouldn't see him and he swore against me a terrible vengeance. I have lived in daily fear of him. When I saw him on board the same ship with us I nearly died with terror. How he got hold of my glove I can not imagine."

"Mlle. Irma here stole it and dropped it in his cabin. She also secreted the pearl in your hand-bag," interpolated Clarke.

Irma started to protest and then, thinking better of it, relapsed into her studied pose of indifference.

"Oh, that was it! And I had been such a friend to her! I thought she was doing me a favor even when she brought a note from him telling me if I would consent to 'mother' the pearl back to life for him he would give me the letter. All I was to do was to pass his cabin door on the stroke of four bells to-night and he would hand both out to me. I thought I incurred no danger in merely walking past the cabin."

"No danger," exclaimed Clarke, "with this woman accomplice hiding in the passage ready to drag you into the cabin by force if the persuasions of the Baron failed, with the man awaiting you in dishabille? Do you suppose you would have received any mercy in the version of the story Mlle. Mazareff would have circulated? You can judge what her friendship is worth when you know that she, to conceal her own complicity in the affair, dragged you in and clasped your fainting fingers about the dagger in the Baron's breast."

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Lady Clara caught her breath and trembled. Irma bit her lips and tapped her foot nervously on the floor.

"And it's to you, you wonderful chap," exclaimed Sir Arthur, "that we owe her rescue from this terrible plot."

"Not to me. To the pearl, the Tear of Buddha."

"To the pearl?"

"Yes, to the pearl, which brought a more terrible vengeance upon the head of the Baron than he planned for Lady Clara!"

CHAPTER IX

THE VENGEANCE OF THE PEARL

"DO YOU mean to say that the pearl was responsible for this murder?" asked Captain Davidson, his countenance clearing.

"'He who touches the Tear of Buddha plays with death,' so runs the proverb among the hills. Its career since it was snatched from the Persian gulf is traced in blood. First it glittered in the crown of a border king in Afghanistan. He was cruelly murdered by one of his ministers. In border foray the pearl was ravished by the wild hordes of the Punjab. It was next named the Eye of Kali, set in the forehead of the terrible wife of Siva in her temple up by the Lippu Pass. It was from Kali the gem was rifled by the Bhotiyas, and carried to Lhasa, where, as I have told you, it passed to the possession of the golden Bodhisat in the Jo-kang.

"But what has all this got to do with the murder of to-night?" broke in the Captain.

"The vow to Kali to recover her lost eye never has died in the Punjab. At the court of Nepal the jewel was safe. When it left there in the possession of Baron von Gersdorff, three men, devotees of Kali, of the terrible band of Thuggee, followed. To-night they struck. The Eye of Kali claimed another victim, another Thug the right to merit by a holy murder."

"But how can you prove all this? How could he have entered the cabin and escaped again, leaving no trace?"

"No trace but a bloody footprint on the wall! A monkey or a Punjabi Thug could swing down from the deck above and climb through the cabin port. But wait, I have stronger proof than my word or the idle legends of the, hills the proof that nature devised and that science at last discovered."

Stepping to the door Clarke said to the fourth officer in charge of the three natives, "Carry them in and seat them against the wall."

Going to each of them, he lifted his feet and carefully examined them. Then, indicating the center one of the trio, he said,

"This is the murderer. You will find, Doctor Grant, that every whorl and convolution of his footlines conforms to those of the bloody footprint in the cabin. There is even better proof. Here is dried blood. Fortunately these chaps never wash. Take your scalpel and scrape off enough for an analysis. You will find it exactly corresponds in the proportion of hemoblobin—which, as you know, varies greatly in different bodies—to the blood of the baron."

"But the pearl?" said the Captain. "If the beggar lifted it he ought to have it about his filthy clothes somewhere."

"He has. Ah! See there."

Clarke pointed to a bulge in the Thug's left cheek. With a lightning like motion his fingers went around the throat of the native.

"Quick, Doctor, your help! Force his jaws!"

The Doctor forced the scalpel between his teeth. He forced the jaws open. For an instant we saw the pear-shaped pearl as the native rolled it over his tongue. Then he gave a gulp.

"He's swallowed it!" exclaimed Clarke. "I thought I had his wind shut off, but I felt it slip past my fingers. You saw it, Captain. Are you satisfied you have the right man?"

"Your case seems to be complete. But the knife? That belonged to this woman."

"Perhaps, Mlle. Mazareff," said Clarke, "you can at least explain why the Baron was killed with your knife."

"It was not mine. It belonged to him," replied Irma.

"But the initials, I. M., they are yours, not his."

The blonde woman sat in silence while the color left her cheeks.

"THEN Von Gersdorff was not his name. Now I have it—I remember—he must be the same! This man was Ivan Makofsky. That was the name of the traitor who with Olga Swarenski betrayed the Circle of Twelve at Odessa into

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the hands of the Third Section. And you are Olga Swarenski."

"He was my husband," she said simply, seeking in vain to stifle a sob. For the first time during her terrible ordeal the green eyes were filled with tears.

"Then a wire from Aden to the revolutionary committee at Odessa will be the fittest punishment for you."

"Oh, no, not that!" she said, clasping her hands in supplication and dropping on her knees before Clarke. "You have the truth. You have the papers—three years' struggle in the snow and cold of the mountain passes, every distance paced on foot and marked almost in his blood! Is it confession you want? You, American, Buddhist, Englishman, whatever you are, have left nothing for me to confess. It is true that we planned the downfall of this man whose influence upon the frontier alone stood in the way of our great plans for Russia. The woman was but the tool to drag him down. Ivan had forgotten her long ago—we loved—and now he is dead. Great God, I have suffered enough this night!

"But I had to carry out the plan—when I went to his cabin to-night and found him dead, it was my shrieks you heard. I had only time to get the precious papers from the belt around his waist when I heard this woman's step in the hall, coming to the rendezvous we had planned. I would throw the guilt upon her, dethrone in scandal her husband's power among the rajahs of the hills, and alone carry the pearl and the packet to Petersburg that the name of Ivan Makofsky should be honored among those brave souls who have aided to extend the frontier of Russia to the long-coveted sea. But for you, all would have gone well. You have triumphed over a woman. Be merciful and spare me that silent, sudden stab in the back that comes we know not when!"

"And if you are spared?"

"I will be silent. I will go anywhere. Back to New York. Surely in these years they have forgotten Josephine Jessop."

"It is for Sir Arthur Orminston to say," said Clarke.

"But what does it all mean?" asked Sir Arthur. "Not another Dorgieff case, I hope."

"Just that. The Baron was the successor of Dorgieff. He attempted to carry out the work of that intriguing monk to turn Tibet and the passes of the Himalayas over to the Bear. The pearl, a personal gift from Jung Bahadur, Maharajah of Nepal, to the Baron, would be made to appear in Petersburg as a testimonial to Nicholas himself."

"But this is treason, war, even, if not nipped in the bud! The proofs? Have you the proofs?"

"This packet contains surveys of all the passes, plans of all fortifications and, I venture to say, although I have not examined it, letters from the five kings of the hills."

"I shall place it in the hands of the Viceroy," exclaimed Sir Arthur, reaching for the packet.

"No. I shall deliver it to the Viceroy myself," returned Clarke firmly, concealing the bundle of red oiled silk in his robe.

"Are you of the Charm and the Amulet?" eagerly queried Sir Arthur.

"No, although I have the greatest respect for that wonderful secret service. It is through no fault of theirs that I anticipated them. I was in Lhasa when Younghusband's expedition drove Dorgieff out. I followed him and obtained this baron's correspondence with him."

"Wait, stop!"

Sir Arthur put up his hand in horror, while he looked suspiciously at me.

"Oh," replied Clarke, "I can answer for Mr. Sexton. I think we can trust two such loyal Britons as Captain Davidson and Doctor Grant. Besides, it is now a closed incident."

"But this woman?"

"I have drawn her teeth. The best disposition to make of her will be quietly to advise Scotland Yard to ship her back to America."

"And you? Your name? Your authority?"

"The authority of the Viceroy. I am acting under him alone. I am an American detective."

"That is a pity. But you could become naturalized. The highest post you can ask awaits you in the Indian Secret Service."

"No, I want to see my own land again after ten years wandering. I have an idea that Mr. Sexton, here, my former associate, and I will take up our old work together. In that case we shall send you our cards and solicit a continuation of your custom," replied Clarke laughingly.

"Custom, man! I owe you a debt I can never repay!" said Sir Arthur earnestly.

"And I can only thank you from the

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depths of my heart," said Lady Clara simply, rising and putting both her hands into Clarke's.

"Your thanks," he answered reverently; "what greater reward could a man earn? The gold of the Viceroy will not compare."

I was anxious to escape and I knew of old that Clarke was secretly embarrassed. Besides, there was the beautiful, green-eyed Irma, sitting idly, swinging her foot, watching us, dissecting us with the scalpel of her inscrutable look. She knew to a stiver what our protestations of eternal friendship were worth. And there were the black carven features of the three Thugs against the bulkhead. And over all hung the pall of that inert bulk of mortal matter in the Baron's cabin.

AGAIN we stood under the overhang of the bridge watching the *Mongolia's* prow cleaving the phosphorescent foam as she ground her way westward through the quicksilver sea. Below we heard the steady tramp of men along the forecastle deck.

"See," said Clarke, "our three friends of the steerage going to the 'brig.' After all, their only crime is an erroneous belief in deity."

Suddenly there was a scuffle, and quick cries. The sailors on either side of the leading Thug, he of the bloody foot, were bowled over. The native lurched to the rail. A black form hurtled over the side. We saw the splash. A phosphorescent eddy opened for an instant and then closed forever. No need to lower a boat. The manacles and leg-irons dragged him straight down!

"There goes the Tear of Buddha back to its home on the bed of the Arabian Gulf!" mused Clarke. "Well, so it will be with all of us. A little stirring about in the affairs of the world, then back to Mother Nature. And the world will wag on without us, just as it will without the Tear of Buddha."

"Come on, old man, get your mind off it," I protested. "Tell me about yourself. How in the world could you hit the nail on the head in this mystery every time as you did?"

"I did nothing wonderful. In fact it was scarcely a case to bring out my powers. I merely acted as the occasion arose, from knowledge I already possessed. I knew Von Gersdorff's plans from the start. I entered the Buddhist monastery at Khatmandu in this disguise and discovered that the Baron was active at the Nepalese court. I did not know of the pearl until you came to my aid. Then I knew its history, and the purpose of the Thugs was at once clear to me. Had I had the least idea they would strike before reaching London I should have warned him. I suppose word of the supposed theft of the pearl reached them and precipitated the blow."

"And Mlle. Mazareff?"

"I had her record of old. Her relations with Von Gersdorff puzzled me until you supplied the link I needed. That line from 'Ivanhoe' is the exact counterpart of the warning phrase of the Russian third section. Irma merely used it to notify the Baron that her trap for Lady Clara was laid. By the way, old fellow, I hope I didn't presume too much in announcing our partnership?"

"You read my wish as you always have done. Life holds nothing for me henceforth but intense activity. But surely, Clarke, you won't think of giving up the wonderful and brilliant career that this triumph will open for you?"

"Yes, I'm going back. For ten years, on the steppes of Tibet, buried in the monasteries of Lhasa, dawdling at the courts of the hill rajahs, I've heard the call of Broadway dinning in my ears. Perhaps, Sexton, we will find some diplomatic nuts to crack at home. If not, there is always the hydra-headed demon of crime to tax our wits."

Clarke laid his hand on my shoulder and pointed off the starboard bow where the first reflected flush of the crimsoning sky astern showed against the fleecy cloudbanks in the west.

"It's there, old chap, the flare of the lights of Coney. They're just beginning now to flash out over the Lower Bay. You can't see them, for they're behind that little point of Arabia, and the fat bulge of Africa. But they're there, and we're going back to them!"

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The Camp-Fire

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers.

BULLSEYE CLIFTON in "South of Panama," says Mr. Rawlinson, is drawn from life—a man who, along with his associates, "has for years carried on a daring hold-up game in Bolivia, Chili and Argentina. These men know the mountain trails like Indians and plan their raids with tremendous success. He is wanted in this country—in the Southwest—for similar work.

Mr. Rawlinson has circled the globe a couple of times in his wanderings and has seen many strange lands, but of them all he knows and likes Bolivia best. But this isn't because it is what you would call a pleasant country.

FREDERICK WILLIAM WALLACE is, at this writing, on board the schooner *Dorothy M. Smart* off the Banks of Newfoundland. ADVENTURE, perhaps more than any other fiction magazine, is blessed with authors who write their stories from first-hand knowledge and experience, and Mr. Wallace is no exception to the rule. You will like his tale in this issue. Also, you will remember his story, in the April number, of the Halifax fishermen who take on a deep-sea voyage to the neighborhood of Cape Horn and, after some strategy and fighting, come back with a rich cache of sealskins. Here is an interesting bit from one of Mr. Wallace's letters concerning the facts back of that exciting tale:

"A Skin Game at Deception Island" was written up through my acquaintance with the Halifax sealers and fishermen. The map and description of Deception Island were given to me by one of the crew of a whaler which hauled inside the lagoon to refit. The incident regarding the drowning in the belly of a foresail happened to my father, and out of these facts I constructed the yarn.

I WROTE to E. A. Morphy to find out whether he, too, had not had some adventures of his own. In reply there came to me from Blair Athol, High Wycombe, Bucks, England, one of the most amusing letters I have ever received. Mr. Morphy is a dyed-in-the-wool world-wanderer, so the above is not by way of being a permanent address, but even a world-wanderer must sometimes stop long enough in one place to write a letter.

Some day we shall hear around the camp-fire the good stories Mr. Morphy tells of the world and himself all the way from Singapore to Chicago, but his best introduction will be "The Good Samaritans" in this number. So, for this time, it is enough to say that he hails from Killarney itself, was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, and still has "a brogue you could hang your hat on."

I am forty-five years old, and spent twenty-one of those years battering about in various interesting places. I write things for a livelihood. Like all would-be literary men, I am blind to my proper abilities. Were I to belong to a proper scheme of civilization—like that of Bellamy's "Looking Backward," where every man was made to work at that job for which his talents were best adapted—I would be a cook.

And just this word about the people in his stories:

When writing about Mr. Trench, I am always

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dreaming of that most charming and genial of good fellows, —— ——. If you knew any of the Western sports of twenty years ago, you would not have to be told that Bill Trench's partner, Mr. Carrington, was the one and only —— ——, of San Francisco and elsewhere, who, despite his somewhat unfortunate calling, was one of the whitest and straightest of men (outside of business) on the continent.

WHATEVER he may say to the contrary, here is a man with the Spirit of Adventure strong within him—George Frederic Stratton, with a good story in this number. This is how he put it in a letter to me:

Salt Lake, Utah.

MY DEAR MR. HOFFMAN:

I have been up in the canyons for two weeks past, loafing and shooting, twenty miles away from communication, or I should have answered your favor before.

No! Although I've wandered from home several times, and carried my home with me, there's nothing in it of adventure. But I'll reel it off:

Born in England fifty-five years ago, destined by my parents for the law, and wasted two good years in a stuffy London office, with one of the oldest and most respectable firms in the profession. Cut it out. Skipped to Canada—to the shores of Georgian Bay, and on Lake Nipissing, where the existence of great mineral wealth was not suspected by even the oldest trappers. I've always been unlucky enough to be ahead of the time, but not ahead of the game. Stayed there two years, logging and hunting, lumber-piling and hunting, and timber-searching and hunting, impartially. Stole on to a lumber schooner bound for Detroit, and then "accepted a position" as a lumber-piler at a great match-factory. Six months later I got into a woodworking factory as a machine operator. Foreman in one year.

So it has gone: a dozen years in the Middle West; another dozen years on the Atlantic coast, always with big manufacturing companies. Foreman, superintendent, and then again on the road for a while, exploiting and installing some new machinery. My last six years of business action was as assistant paymaster at the Lynn plant of the General Electric Company—twelve thousand hands.

I resigned three years ago and dropped into writing, especially business and semi-technical stuff for the *World's Work*, *Scientific American*, *Technical World* and *Saturday Evening Post*, incidentally writing some fiction.

Came out to Salt Lake City to visit my son, who was in charge of an engineering contract. Found him in love with the country and the climate, caught it myself, bought a fruit-ranch at the foot of the Wasatch Mountains, and lived happy ever after.

So you see, there's nothing specially adventurous in that, but I've seen somewhat of life in a good many phases, from the doings and feelings of the yard-lumper up to those of the great managers. In a mild way, it's been a life of continuous adventure in its continual contact with the exploiting development of finance and manufacture. Since I left that old Lincoln's Inn moss-grown law-office, I have never spent one week with any humdrum conservative concern.

J. M. ALLEN says that Grouch Grant in "The Reclamation of Kid Sand" "had cut pugilism to be a policeman in one of the cities of Missouri when I knew him. That was when I was in the show business. Speakeasy permits me to be a friend of his."

THE lost sacred gem of the ancient Incas—that kindles the imagination, doesn't it? Well, some time ago I spoke of three men who know where there is buried treasure. Among other responses from our readers came a letter from Mr. Chas. H. Beers, then in Eustis, Fla., to tell me of a man who knows where there is a fourth buried treasure:

I refer to the long-sought-for chalchihuitl, the sacred gem of the old Mexicans. I am personally acquainted with the only American (who is, by the way, a Frenchman) who possesses the entire confidence of a direct descendant of the Montezumas of Mexico. I have several of their old historical gems, some thirty pounds of the rough material matrix, and know where the ancient workings are located. The account seems to me very interesting, and very little is known of this precious stone outside of the knowledge I have secured.

The following from the El Paso *Herald* is also of interest:

Charles H. Beers, a mining engineer of New York, but who is well known in El Paso, has found a mine which he states contains one of the most valuable and curious gems in the world. Among the ancient Mexicans the stone was called chalchihuitl, pronounced *chal-che-we-tal*.

"You will find in the history of the conquest of Mexico," said Mr. Beers, before leaving, "that the ambassadors of Montezuma brought to Cortez, among other valuable presents, four gems which they called chalchihuitl, and told him that each gem was worth more than a load (two hundred and forty pounds) of gold. The historian describes the gem as being translucent, of a beautiful greenish blue, streaked with white. It was more highly esteemed and considered of more value than diamonds, rubies or emeralds. The ancient Mexicans were sun-worshipers, and some of the gem material shows a wonderful resemblance to the rays of the morning sun. Some of these gems also show the form and shape of a beetle, as if photographed in the heart of the stone." Dr. Alfred Free, America's highest authority on precious stones, states: "The gem called chalchihuitl is of the most beautiful blue color mottled with white," and adds that Mr. Beers's gems fit the description.

Letters from authorities of the U. S. Geological Survey and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology testify to the

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beauty of the gem, and support Mr. Beers' conclusion that it is the sacred stone of the ancient Mexicans.

Mr. Beers first saw the gem-material in the possession of a Yaqui Indian, who placed it before his shrine beside the cross and candle and believed it to be a protection against sickness and accident and an omen of success.

HE WAS born in Yankton, South Dakota, when that place was "inhabited or frequented by many men famous in the history of the Northwest, and by others who might better be characterized as notorious in that same history; a rendezvous of soldiers and Indians, good and bad, lawmakers and law-breakers, frontiersmen, steamboatmen and freighters." And the early days of the Northwest, together with Civil War times and the regular army, have always held special interest for Joseph Mills Hanson—an interest reflected in nearly all of his books, stories and verse. He has a leaning toward writing "fiction that is one-tenth fiction and nine-tenths history," but his tale in this number certainly shows that in any case he knows how to tell a rattling good story, history or no history.

EVERYTHING under the sun, except a millionaire. Schoolmaster, actor, entertainer, commercial traveler, typist, toy-manufacturer, editor — Lloyd Williams. Read "The Girl from Olympia."

IT'S been some time since we've had a story from Clarice Vallette McCauley about the fascinating and exceedingly up-and-coming Carmelita Sofia McCann, so "The Champagne Bubble" next month will be doubly welcome.

Not at all incidentally, the author asks me the following question:

Did you ever cross a river on an invisible (ice-covered) pontoon-bridge, in a great, swaying Concord-coach, dragged along by six half-tamed horses? This is the way of it. A washout had carried off the railroad bridge, necessitating our driving to the nearest junction to catch the train. At five o'clock on a dreary December morning (the temperature was exactly zero) we drove down the rugged mountain trail. Snow had been falling all night. When we had crossed the river before, the sun had been shining, the pontoon was visible; there had been exhilaration, no terror, in the experience. Now, the obliterating snow, covering the thin coating of river ice and the bridge alike, had done its work so well that, for all I could see, we might have been directly over the water. Up on the boot beside the driver, I shivered whenever I thought of the sleepy company dozing inside the coach, and recalled tales I had heard of a lumber-wagon that once came down this same trail, over this same pontoon-bridge—the misstep — the frightened, plunging horses, the——

"Wishin' you were inside?" grinned the driver.

"Not for the world!" I answered promptly. "But how can you see where to go?"

He looked down at his hands, and for the first time I noticed how slackly the reins fell over the horses' backs.

"I don't," he answered laconically. "I leave it to them."

HE NEARLY went to the Graeco-Turkish war in 1897 as a war correspondent, but the war finished itself before there was time to start. He was first lieutenant of A Company, 10th Illinois, during the Spanish-American war, but Illinois sent nine regiments to the front and stopped right there. He went with Wellman on the airship *America* to the North Pole, but got no farther than Paris, though that was almost as far as Wellman got. His plans were laid to go to the front with the Japs in the Russian-Japanese war, be captured by the Russians and then recaptured by the Japs, but just then he was promoted from reporter to editor and couldn't very well assign himself.

In short, Frank Lovell Nelson, author of this month's novelette and of many another good story, feels that the Spirit of Adventure has given him the worst of it ever since he was born in Cincinnati thirty-six years ago.

However, he has had all the usual excitement of a reporter's life. He states it briefly as follows:

Went into newspaper work in Chicago in 1895 as a cub reporter when George Ade was the bright and shining light of the reportorial world, and Charlie Seymour, Eugene Field, Billy Glenn, Ray Stannard Baker, Finley Peter Dunne ("Mr. Dooley"), and a lot more, now dead, famous, or both, were the "little tin gods" worshiped by all cubdom. The intervening years have been spent on various papers, six of them as Sunday editor of the Chicago *Record-Herald* and the past two upon *Hampton's Magazine* and the New York *World*.

But if his own adventures haven't been as big as he'd like to have 'em, "The Emerald Buddha" will show that he can write bully ones to order.

THIS is a tale that was told to Talbot Mundy who passed it on to the Camp-Fire. He heard it from two different men, in different parts of the country, and at

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different times; both of them said they had taken part in the adventure. Mr. Mundy adds that it was also a matter of common knowledge in Lourenço Marques when he was there:

AT THE time of the famous Jameson raid in South Africa there were two forces ready for action: one was to act from the south and the other from the north, but the southern force acted prematurely, and the northern one, which was waiting under arms in Rhodesia, was ordered to disband. But the men didn't care to scatter until they had had one good splurge all together.

British territory at that moment was not exactly a hotbed of hospitality toward them. So they hired three special trains and descended in a body on Lourenço Marques, to "take tea" with the Portuguese; and the Portuguese officials, seeing how many they were, contrived for the time being to disguise their displeasure. They soon exhausted the delights of Lourenço Marques, however—about three bars and a band-stand was the extent of them in those days—and time began to hang heavily on their hands; also, money grew scarce.

But out in the harbor of Delagoa Bay lay three Portuguese battleships; they have been there since the dawn of ironclad history, manned, armed and provisioned after a style, but seldom if ever used. All at once it dawned on some brilliant genius among them that in those battle-ships lay the key to the situation; in them were the makings of the finest spree that ever happened, as well as the almost equally important return fare to Rhodesia.

ONE fine morning they chartered every rowboat that could be found in the harbor, and one or two cargo rafts, and at about six A. M. they pulled out to the battleships in three divisions, one for each ship. They drew alongside unquestioned, and the rest was easy. The crew, with the solitary exception of the gold-braided Captain who commanded the largest battleship, were driven down below and told to get up steam at once under pain of instant death; the Captain was kept on the deck of the flagship and told to navigate on similar terms. They steamed out of the harbor and cruised up and down the coast until the supply of coal looked like giving out. Then they came back again—with decks cleared for action by the simple process of dumping all deck-hamper overboard.

Their first proceeding after dropping anchor was to turn the guns of all three ships on to the residence of the Lieutenant-Governor of Delagoa, and on the fort that overlooks the harbor. Naturally that caused dire consternation, and they allowed some time to elapse for the feeling of panic to take hold properly. Then they made the Captain run up signals which read:

"Send the Lieutenant-Governor aboard the flagship to make terms, or we will blow Lourenço Marques off the map!"

THE Lieutenant-Governor came. When he got aboard he was ordered to go back to his office and write out a free pardon for all concerned, and free passes for all hands on the Portuguese railroad as far as the British border.

The Lieutenant-Governor remonstrated; he called them pirates, and they laughed at him; he threatened to make an "international incident" out of it and to appeal to England, but they still laughed at him; finally he struck a heroic attitude and refused pointblank. So they loaded a midship swivel-gun right under his eyes and trained it carefully on his residence; one man stood by, waiting for the order to let her off. The Lieutenant-Governor succumbed then. He still maintained that it was piracy, but he capitulated, and they told him to make out the pardons and passes on official paper, with his signature as Lieutenant-Governor, his seal of office, and the signatures of at least two officials as witnesses. The swivel-gun was kept trained on his residence until he had done it.

With their pardons in their pockets, the pirates then handed the ships over to their crews and came ashore. So they got back to Rhodesia as they had come, in three special trains, but this time at Portuguese Government expense.

THAT was probably the first time in history that a regiment of filibusters ever took a joy-ride in the warships of a foreign power and obtained remission of their sin by turning the guns of the fleet on their unwilling hosts. Of course, having granted them a general pardon, the Portuguese Government could not make an international incident of it and save their faces; they took the wisest course and said nothing.

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Manhood and Moonshine

In the mountain fastnesses of Virginia, almost within the shadow of the Capitol dome at Washington, grew a race of big-boned six-footers, the Allens.

Nearly a hundred years ago William Allen, an ox of a man who fought with his fists and cowhide boots, started a wolf-breed which was long to rule Carroll County in terror.

Floyd, his grandson, early took the lead of the pack. His brother Jack challenged him. They disagreed. Jack shot Floyd through the lungs; Floyd shot Jack in the middle of the forehead. His last shot gone, Floyd fell upon Jack and beat him with his pistol butt until strength failed him.

Horse-swapping, note-shaving, storekeeping, moonshining and farming, the Allens prospered.

"An Allen never goes to jail" was the creed of the pack, sustained by terror and by politics.

Officers of the law barked at, but did not bite, the Allens.

But "the land down yonder," at the foot of the mountains, reared a man unafraid to lay down his life that the law might triumph—a true Virginian.

Stranger than fiction is the true story of the lawless clan who annihilated a court of justice in the mountains of Virginia on Thursday, March 14, 1912.

It is all wonderfully told in

Everybody's Magazine

June Number ***15c everywhere***

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What a Duel!

Picture a Northern spy and a Confederate lieutenant on horseb with drawn sabers. Their sweethearts, two lovely Southern girls—sist mind you—at the men's stirrups, trying to keep them apart.

The horse of one rears, wheels and is off; the other follows. hundred yards and the first halts and faces about. The other is upon l like a whirlwind; there's a flash and clash of swords.

One girl rushes forward with leveled pistol. The other snatch from her.

The horses crash together; a saber thuds on a shoulder, glancing There is a thrust of the other sword, better aimed. The fight is over.

The Northerner, alone in the enemy's country, wounded and wanted a spy, turns his horse, and is halted by the girl he loves—a markswom

The papers he has risked everything to secure, plans of the fortifica of Richmond, and the correspondence of the Confederacy with Euro powers, are demanded. He throws them to her and is off.

But that is not the beginning of the most exciting love story you l ever read, *nor yet is it the end.* The girl knows the man too well to be that he will give up so easily what he has come for. How does it all come

How can a Northern spy, whom all Richmond is looking for, ho get out of the city alive? How did he ever get in?

The story is Crittenden Marriott's "Sally Castleton, Southerner." begins in the June

Everybody's Magazine

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Adventure

JULY
15 CENTS

"There was mockery in
the shining depths of her
eyes—a challenge.
In a flash his arm went
round her."
From
"THOUSAND DOLLARS A MILE"

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MONTH

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THE RIDGWAY COMPANY, PUBLISHERS OF EVERYBODY'S MAGAZI

"A caravan from China comes;
For miles it sweetens all the air
With fragrant silks and stealing gums,
Attar and myrrh.
A caravan from China comes.

"O merchant, tell me what you bring
With music sweet of camel bells;
How long have you been traveling
With these sweet smells?
O merchant, tell me what you bring."

Yes, we'll tell you what we bring—breath of adventure, spirit of romance, the flash of action, the glory of color and the coming true of dreams. Here are they all—all the things that all your life you have wanted in a story. Love and intrigue and daring deeds in a setting that is in itself a joy. Laughter and the thrill of danger. Mystery and cunning brains and devious ways, with nations struggling in the background.

A girl, a very nice girl stenographer in a New York hotel. In her heart great dreams of great adventures and romance. Love has not come to her—yet. There comes a man—a man who has been *living* the things she dreamed. And then her dreams come true. Even a great dream she had not dreamed at all. Come true amid "music sweet of camel bells," though her caravan, unlike Mr. Le Gallienne's in the poem, hails from Persia. And there are other things than sweetness in the tune of camel bells.

A story for women? Yes! A story for men—for red-blooded men? Yes! For this girl plays a man's part among men, and yet—remains a woman.

We did not think the title was as good as the story, so we dropped it. We can't tell you yet what the new title will be; you'll just have to run your eye down the table of contents for a story by Grace Sartwell Mason and John Northern Hilliard.

And watch for "The Grind," a complete novelette that will hold you tense from start to finish. That is, of course, unless you are a man and don't care for a six-day test of endurance, speed, strength and brains; or a woman, and don't like a love-story.

Watch for the August

Adventure

On Sale July 3

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VOL. 4 ADVENTURE NO. 3

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, MANAGING EDITOR

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IN MY home town, Columbus, Ohio, any of the older inhabitants can tell you about General Joe Geiger. So can thousands of people all over the Buckeye State, and in other States as well.

General Joe Geiger was said to be the homeliest man in Ohio. He said so himself, gloried in it, boasted of it. He was also one of the wittiest, most brilliant, most original.

It hasn't anything to do with the story, but General Joe Geiger wasn't a general at all. It just happened that once he was the only member of the State Legislature who hadn't a title. He was a great favorite with the other members and they grieved over his sad condition. Then they took matters into their own hands, and made him a general. At least that is one of the many traditions handed down about him.

DURING one hot presidential campaign General Geiger was to follow U. S. Senator John Sherman and some other famous speaker—Governor Dennison, I think it was—at a big Republican rally at a town in the northern part of the State. He was known as a splendid orator and the vast open-air audience faced him expectantly as he rose and came forward

He stood silent a moment, looking out over the sea of upturned faces. Then he spoke, dignified for all his homeliness, earnest, impressive:

"Fellow citizens, I have listened to Senator Sherman as he set before you the economic issues at stake in this campaign, and in my heart I know that I can add nothing to his masterly exposition. I have listened to Governor Dennison as he made clear before you the moral and patriotic duties that will confront us as men and patriots when we step into the voting-booth to decide our country's fate for four long years, and I feel that he has left nothing that I can add. The ground is covered.

"AND yet, fellow citizens, there is one subject left untouched, that may well have place wherever the people of this great Republic are gathered together. I refer, gentlemen, to that glorious bird of freedom, the American Eagle! Under his mighty pinions we have grown from a handful of struggling Colonies to a great and powerful nation whose voice is heard and heeded in the councils of the world. With him as the emblem of our dear-bought liberty we have upheld against all comers the noble principles laid down by the founders of our Republic.

"Gentlemen, I believe in sentiment. Sentiment moves the world. It wins battles and makes possible the greater victories of peace. I believe in patriotism. It is a flame that we must keep fresh kindled."

AT LAST, with his eyes flashing, his whole body tense and his right arm raised high above his head he pointed up into the empyrean blue, his hand following in slow circles the imaginary flight of the majestic bird of his eulogy:

"Far above the earth he flies, rising, rising, ever rising. Higher and higher yet, climbing with sweeping circles toward the very heights of heaven. Triumphant and unafraid he soars, and soars"—the orator's upraised arm still following the rising spiral of the flight—"and soars—and soars"—the voice checks, the pointing arm hesitates, then goes on, the speaker's face turned up to the sky, his audience seemingly forgotten — "and soars—and—soars"— the circling arm wavers, the voice stops, the face remains turned upward.

Suddenly the arm drops to his side, the face, wearing a look of dazed surprise, sinks to a level with the eyes of his audience.

"Gentlemen," he stammers, "I'm hanged if I haven't lost sight of that—bird!"

And General Geiger calmly resumed his seat.

WELL, General Geiger's eagle is like the next number of ADVENTURE. Flies so high and needs so many fine adjectives to describe it that we can barely see the—thing. But you can. Watch for it.

It isn't often I let myself break out in strong praise of our own magazine, but this time I can't help it. You will forgive me, I think, when you start the new serial and read the complete novelette in the August number. Not to mention the short stories.

And don't forget that this editorial page has been enlarged into a department at the very end of the magazine.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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